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The Post-Pandemic Recovery Strategy of the Educational System in South Africa The 'New Normal'

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Abstract

The objective of the study explore the 'new normal' introduced by the global covid-19 pandemic and the South African education post-pandemic recovery strategy. The study discussed the recovery strategies adopted by the South African institution of higher learning post-COVID-19, to understand the innovative measures used, as well as the impact of the covid-19 epidemic in South Africa. On March 15, 2020, all South African post-secondary institutions began to implement steps to achieve the government's mandate of social isolation and lockdown, while continuing to conduct their main business of teaching and learning. To prepare for the national lockdown measures, a public higher education institution performed an immediate examination of all operations supporting and enabling the academic project. "There was a 'new normal,' with all teaching and learning activities taking place entirely online and academic staff needing to quickly prepare and capacitate themselves". This paper uses a qualitative technique or approach and the data were primarily collected through secondary sources with baseline available literature to critically reflect on how societies have dealt with such pandemics and shocks, situating the South African experience in a global and comparative perspective. It serves as an institutional case study, critically examining how its ideal of accessible excellence and equity was mediated by current events and its agility, emphasizing some of the problems and conflicts during the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, university, academics, innovative, recovery, lockdown

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The advent of COVID-19 has affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender. Universities throughout the world have been presented as major players in coping with the numerous consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic. As "centers of excellence in research, teaching, and innovation, their justification for this role is long recognized and it is fair to believe that the higher education sector will step up in these areas of strength after COVID-19" (Enaifoghe, 2021: 63). However, we should require more of our universities, to seek contributions that are more firmly rooted in their societal obligations as "anchor" institutions. Wilson (2012), characterizes an anchor institution as "a vital presence in the community". A crucial cultural center; a large influence on employment; a significant income gatherer and spender; a position as a major revenue gatherer and spender.

A role as a major employer; a purchaser of goods and services; an attractor of businesses and talented individuals (Wilson 2012: 73). Most colleges are not unfamiliar with reaching out to the community; however, post-COVID-19 budgetary constraints may have pushed them to make disproportionate attempts to recuperate lost money, potentially at the expense of existing or future community-focused programs. This sort of reaction is unavoidable if cash-strapped colleges do not think properly about the difficulties and prospects "for change that the post-COVID-19 period provides" (Enaifoghe et al, 2021). The institutions may choose to participate just partially or not at all in addressing social issues, that have lower income incentives. One such difficulty is the need to strengthen social cohesion and confidence in the system, for example, by increasing access to higher education for underserved groups and moving away from the perceived exclusive goal of enabling.

“...the accumulation of cultural capital by individuals that can be sold up into money for an elite, and instead aim to comprehend and oppose inequality, injustice, exclusion, and othering” (Maginess, 2020: 4).

The emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as the accompanying lockdown and physical isolation precautions, not only caused immense disruption in the area of education and skills services but also fueled innovation in online learning. While “access to study and skill development was maintained at universities, some settings experienced a quick move to distance learning in technical and vocational education and training due to a rapid shift to distance learning in technical and vocational education and training (TVET)” (Bashir et al., 2021: 1). The existing “social and digital gaps prevented the most marginalized groups from continuing their education, placing them at danger of falling farther behind (Pentaris, Hanna and North, 2020). With a few exceptions, “universities are increasingly utilizing distance learning technologies” ((Dhawan, 2020). The learning solution programs have not assisted in the development of practical skills or the organization of work-based learning, both of which are critical components for academic - vocational accomplishment.

Business Closures and profit losses impacted employment and opportunities for decent work, as well as the availability of apprenticeship positions in firms. Underperformance among teaching and learning was caused by a lack of working distance-learning platforms and educational resources, disruptions in assessment and certification, and a general decrease in training quality, which increased the probability of persons dropping out of school. However, the crisis may have an upside, as indicated by the present study, which is based on the results of an online vote on the repercussions of the COVID-19 epidemic.

2 Literature Review

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has taken an unprecedented economic toll on many countries’ social and economic sectors; as such, Enaifoghe (2021), looks at the multimodal approaches adopted by the South African government to mitigate the impact of the pandemic the scholar noted that between 5 April and 15 May 2020, “the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the World Bank undertook a study on skill development”. According to the International Labour Office (ILO), “the study uncovered a plethora of potential practices in the development of flexible learning and assessment alternatives, ranging from high-tech to low-tech and even no-tech solutions, governed by local circumstances and developing as the crisis progressed” (ILO, 2020).

Public and corporate institution players quickly formed partnerships to expand the availability of affordable distance learning options, establish new training programs, and dedicate more resources to mitigate skill and labour shortages in sectors particularly impacted by the health crisis. The outcomes of these collaborative efforts have resulted in the birth of new and innovative solutions in response to the pandemic. However, we must keep in mind that without additional efforts to establish stronger education institutions, such imaginative approaches will become a fad. The institutes of ‘higher education institutions (HEIs) “worldwide are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with resultant campus closures to enforce social distancing measures” (Ikwegbue et al., 2020: 3). While the interruption affected public health, “the impact on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) was significant” (Desmond-Hellmann, 2020).

“...Many institutions were forced to identify and implement various strategies that contributed to the academic project's sustainability, including but not limited to emergency remote learning and teaching, working from home arrangements for staff, alternative ways to support students, and budget reallocation to address emerging needs ((Nandy, Lodh, and Tang, 2021: 3).

The COVID-19 pandemic altered students' life in a variety of ways, including relocation from their homes and campuses, financial difficulties, the loss of internships, and the requirement to acquire new technologies in addition to the content of their studies (Nandy, Lodh, and Tang, 2021: 3). From an operational standpoint, the majority of South African HEIs have business continuity plans "in place as a result of learning from the #feesmustfall movement in 2015/2016, which sparked heated debates and militant student protests on the fee increases in South African universities" (Enaifoghe and Dlamini, 2020: 37). Due to the unpredictability of student protest activity, the operational effect of these protests included the implementation of business continuity plans in which all academic activities had to be done online or off-campus.

While these strategies may be valuable, it is uncertain if they were and are successful in preparing HEIs to deal with unprecedented dangers to the academic project, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2021). According to Toquero (2020), many “higher education institutions in the Philippines were utterly unprepared for

such an incident". According to Bhuiyan, Sakib, Pakpour et al. (2020), during the COVID-19 epidemic, there are no best practices to emulate and no recognized models to follow. Similarly, Schleicher (2021), recognizes that existing crisis management approaches can be useless during a pandemic, and business continuity can be severely impacted.

"The emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic in South Africa is interwoven within an existing socioeconomic setting afflicted with poverty and profound, unsustainable disparities," (Enaifoghe, 2022: 11). In line with this, HEIs in South Africa faced an unclear future due to diminishing financing in the industry. This meant that HEIs had to examine a variety of factors while deciding how to handle the epidemic, as well as how to prepare for long-term sustainability. "More than a year after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, this essay attempts to make sense of what transpired to draw lessons for the way forward" (Casagrande, Favieri, Tambelli, and Forte, 2020). During the first quarter of the COVID-19 pandemic (April to June 2021), known as the "hard lockdown" era, or Levels 5 and 4 of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown levels, were marked by uncertainty and isolation for South Africans living, learning, and working (Enaifoghe, 2021).

"...Naturally, what was published in the media may not have presented the complete picture of what was going on behind the scenes to keep HEIs running and the academic year intact. As a result, incorporating many sources of knowledge, including the experiences of people who have worked in the HEI sector, is critical for good sense-making" (Reich et al., 2020: 34).

Reflecting on the events brought by COVID-19, this study tries to make sense of the effects of the epidemic, as relating to South African HEIs during the start of the pandemic. The goal of sense-making is to generate a comprehensive image of an event that cannot be properly comprehended (UNESCO, 2021). Messages provided through various online media sources, as well as academics' actual experiences of such an ambiguous occurrence, were evaluated for this aim and in the context of higher education and the COVID-19 epidemic. (Enaifoghe, Maramura and Ndlovu, 2021).

3 Research and Methodology

This section may be divided by subheadings and should contain sufficient detail so that when read in conjunction with cited references, all procedures can be repeated. For experiments reporting results on animal or human subject research, an ethics approval statement should be included in this section. usually in the second section of the paper, method/model/conception of the analysis should be transparently presented and pointed out in case of the research results being subjected to re-testing by interested researchers which is one of the fundamental principles of the scientific methodology).

4 Findings and Discussions

4.1. The 'new normal and teaching and learning amid Covid-19 in a South African university

The term 'new normal' is the condition whereby an economy, population or society, or other entity recovers after a catastrophe, such as a pandemic, when it changes from the scenario that existed previous to the onset of the crisis. According to Anderson, Rainie and Vogels (2021), a majority of scientists believe that substantial societal change would make life worse for the majority of people, as more inequality, growing authoritarianism, and widespread disinformation take root in the aftermath of the COVID-19 epidemic. Nonetheless, other people feel that life will be better in a tele-everything future where workplaces, health care, and social activities improve (Enaifoghe, 2022: 11).

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought about fast and deep changes all around the planet. This deep change is recognized as the new normal. With the longest school closures in decades and a coming recession, this is the greatest blow to education systems in decades (Anderson et al., 2021). It will impede progress toward global development goals, particularly those related to education. Economic crises in nations and worldwide will almost certainly result in fiscal austerity, increased poverty, and fewer resources available for public-sector initiatives from both domestic spending and development aid (Enaifoghe, 2021). All of this will result in a human development crisis that will last long after disease transmission has stopped.

Education system disruptions in the last year have already resulted in significant losses and inequities in learning. All efforts to give remote education are commendable, but it has shown to be an inadequate alternative to in-person learning. Worryingly, even when schools reopen, many children, particularly girls, may not return. School closures and the accompanying interruptions to school attendance and learning are estimated to cost \$10 trillion in lost future wages for impacted students (Enaifoghe, 2022: 14). Schools also play an important role in

assuring the supply of basic health services and healthy meals, as well as protection and psychosocial support, all over the world.

School closures jeopardized children's complete well-being and development, not simply their education. It is not sufficient for schools to merely reopen following COVID-19. We must assist schools in preparing to give assistance and handle the great difficulties that lie ahead. The moment to act is now; a whole generation's future is at risk. Following the significant changes in higher education amid the COVID-19 epidemic, there is a need to combine early thinking and reflective experience to choose the path forward (Bashir et al., 2021).

This study reflects on the impact of COVID-19 and makes sense of events relating to "South African higher education institutions (HEIs) at the commencement of the COVID-19 epidemic". To give views on the context process of the post-COVID-19. This invariably provides insights from both sides of the political spectrum by highlighting the development of a process that occurs at numerous levels, ranging from policy decisions to organizational practices, as well as the effects on both staff and students. The sense-making efforts in the disordered domain go to the chaotic domain, then to the complex domain, then to the complicated domain, and finally to the simple domain.

Due to the idiosyncrasies and highlighted difficulties ranging from vulnerabilities encountered in the higher education industry, the institution attempted to restructure the academic year to cope with wicked challenges, finally depending on professional aid to traverse the virtual university area. Attempting to demonstrate causality in the basic domain was difficult due to the scarcity of information available at the time. Despite these problems, the lessons learned include the need for sense-making among all academic staff, the relevance of cooperation and teamwork, and the need to adjust governance and "self-leadership approaches to the changing ways of working in higher education institutions".

4.2. The global and local context of teaching in higher education amid Covid-19

This section discusses the global and local context of teaching in higher education amid COVID-19 while noting that during the war, warfare, and structural disruptions have caused an extensive change in societies. Some have questioned if Covid-19 might alter higher education in the same manner that the Black Death did in the Middle Ages. In the late 1400s, the plague ravaged over Europe, killing half of the population, driving a shift from a theologically oriented worldview to one that stressed science (Stanmore 2020). In higher education, this transformation was mirrored by uneven enrolment and a shift in discipline specialization. In reality, it is too early to say how influential Covid-19 are in university education.

The current pandemic has added complexity and uncertainty to an already volatile and controversial higher education system, as seen by demonstrations over tuition, decolonization, and accessibility "amongst other issues" (Enaifoghe, 2019). (Motala 2020). In the South African context, the education and societal aims of the higher education system have been highlighted, particularly in terms of the potential and limitations of artificial intelligence, 4IR, and digitalization (Enaifoghe, 2021). Higher education, in particular, is entrusted with preparing graduates for dramatic transformations in society and economics (Ndlovu, Maramura, Enaifoghe, 2020). Universities in Africa, like their counterparts across the world, are expected to contribute to the growth of their society.

Such advances must be supported by teaching and learning methodologies that produce well-educated, socially conscious people with the information, skills, and traits required for a quickly changing period. Menon and Castrillon (2019:12) claim that 'strong disruption of current thinking, established techniques, and procedures are required if higher education and universities are to accomplish significant change in the way they operate or the teaching and learning approach of pedagogies are framed.' The disruptions of this magnitude are project consists of distinct "as is" and "to be" scenarios. The present disturbances are unplanned, and the structural, systemic, and long-term seismic shifts are unknown (Cunha, Chuchu and Maziriri, 2020).

The epidemic has brought to the forefront some issues that are not new but have taken on new significance given the current conditions (Enaifoghe, 2021). The critical pose is as follows;

- *what needs to change in how academics teach and students learn?*
- *What do these changes entail for various countries?*
- *Is learning in a classroom setting with peers better than studying online?*
- *how can online learning prepare students for freshly reconfigured workplaces?*
- *What does the blurring of physical, digital, and technical boundaries entail for social connections and student learning?*

Examples from throughout the world Natural catastrophes and conflicts have affected, delayed, and occasionally destroyed tertiary systems. Syria, for example, has been threatened with the loss of a generation due to strife and brutality. Due to the ongoing interruptions, some of the solutions considered have been to provide students with the option of deferring modules to the next year, as well as the organization of assessments and additional supplemental exams (Al Hessian et al. 2016). "The Covid-19 epidemic has also slowed Somalia's recovery from decades of civil conflict, which has ravaged its institutions, especially tertiary education institutions, and left an estimated 2.6 million people displaced" (Rajab 2020: 6). Czerniewicz (2020) draws "parallels between the disruptions caused by #FeesMustFall at South African colleges between 2015 and 2017 and the present epidemic in terms of the impact on teaching and learning".

The argument is that while "the lessons for higher education remain pertinent, given the swift reactions to student demonstrations in the past, the same disparities exist. Similarly, the final aim was to finish the school year". According to UNESCO (2020), the pandemic has resulted in the physical shutdown of education buildings globally, with at least half of the world's pupils - 890 million in 114 countries - affected. Forecasts for Covid-19's long-term effects range from a 5-year stoppage to a 6-month disruption. Forecasts range from a 15% to a 25% decline in enrolment, depending on the region of the world where the calculations are performed (ICEF Monitor, 2020). Higher education, for example, took two years to recover from the consequences of the SARS outbreak in 2003.

The primary tensions are emphasized in a June 2020 debate on how academic institutions should prepare for the new normal. New developments, according to Marwala (2020), "new advancements in knowledge, science, technology, and economic production methods are the most likely future trajectory." Badat (2020) advises "caution in dealing with the 4IR, arguing that higher education institutions should not use the epidemic to begin and institutionalize the reorganization, restructuring, and modifications demanded by 4IR proponents without an open debate regarding their general suitability".

According to Williamson et al. (2020: 108), "the demand for critical thought on the global pivot to digitally mediated remote and distance education." It is expected that a critical implementation and assessment of university education's reactions to the lockdown, particularly regarding remote teaching and learning, would be urgently required..

5 The Impact of COVID-19 and the adaptation of teaching and learning in South Africa

To understand the impact of COVID-19 and the adaptation of teaching and learning in South Africa, the country went into complete lockdown in the face of the epidemic, and several South African colleges began to plan for the continuation of their teaching and learning operations.

"...The teaching and learning project, like that of other universities nationally and internationally, took centre stage with consideration of the magnitude of the shift required, whether in terms of student numbers, disciplinary differences, a lack of time for staff training, or the need to galvanize and equip all role players in the university" (Enaifoghe, 2019).

The major goal of South African institutions of higher in terms of teaching and learning philosophy is to disseminate "knowledge (learning about) and practices in the knowledge area -learning to be" (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). The many fields of knowledge and their relationships, as well as the distinction "between anecdotal understandings and deeper knowledge based" on research that is thorough and with a well-conceptualized understanding, are important outcomes. It is difficult for both academics and students to achieve these goals through remote teaching and learning. The lockdown occurred soon "before the March/April 2020 academic break, and the whole complex organization of the institution was placed on high alert overnight" (Enaifoghe, 2021).

Leave arrangements were cancelled, and a Covid Coordinating Committee was formed, which met weekly and coordinated the transition to remote teaching and learning with the Management Executive Committee Academic (MECA). This was a monumental job for a university with 50,000 students. Within a fortnight of the start of the lockdown, the foundations and pillars of the university reaction were in place. A key component of the university's management approach was ensuring that professors and students were represented in the response planning procedures. The organization's response was not to be underestimated in its complexity. In retrospect, more time for thinking and coherence would have been beneficial.

The description of how institutions might be "change-oriented" corresponds with how most universities' management approaches the transition process (Julius et al., 1999). This involves connecting the system of checks and balances to the positioning strategy of the university's formal or administrative institutions to facilitate,

promote, and drive change. Since the management's work does not end with a decision-making process, it must be reinforced by action, application, oversight, and assessment. Academics were the frontline implementers of any teaching and learning method, and both academics and students' perspectives needed to be heard.

Academics, for example, emphasized the very real challenges of clinical practice for students of health sciences, psychology, education, and social work. This necessitated intricate manoeuvring between professional bodies, the DHET, and academia. There were frustrations due “to lockdown laws that prevented students from completing the statutory prerequisites for the degrees, as well as the very real health hazards” (Dhawan, 2020). Students were equally concerned and apprehensive since the completion of their degrees may be jeopardized.

Wu et al. (2020) describe the reaction of a Chinese university, stating that the success of the transition to online teaching and learning was reliant on 'organizational agility.' The agility of business processes and technology worked well for the institution. Given the sudden nature of the lockdown, the university's primary plan was to improve communications through a variety of platforms. Amid its messaging was a slew of issues that needed to be addressed immediately, and as the institution realized, this had to be done regularly and persistently. The creation of a dedicated space on the university's web pages to post important communications was an early creative feature.

Communication was essential for a variety of reasons. There was no model from which the university could operate, and the lack of well-established protocols and procedures necessitated frequent communication with all stakeholders. Listening and reacting was also an important step. Communication has to be educational, repetitive, and pastoral all at the same time. Given the university's planned sequence during this time, certain decisions might have come before others.

6 Global Disruption of COOVID-19 and its Impacts on the Educational System

In most industrialized countries, democracy provides a platform for contesting and, to varying degrees, ameliorating these injustices and inequalities. However, except in the most innovative civilized countries, the reputation of such leaders as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's "selfish amoralism" (Judt 2010: 236) has “prompted the rise of populist movements that revel in perpetuating disparities, drawbacks, and outrageous levels of personal wealth for the few”. The epidemic has magnified these and other additional issues (such as sustaining healthcare capacity), and it may be tempting for some colleges to wring their hands and wait for the storm to pass. Unfortunately, “the COVID-19 storm is already having an impact on colleges, Robinson and Maitra (2020), for example, detail a slew of financial issues confronting colleges and institutions across North America”.

These challenges include enrollment drops of up to 20%, reduced state and private support, and the possibility of students claiming refunds for delayed or insufficient tuition. To protect core academic functions, they advocate a higher education version of slash-and-burn, which includes the elimination of low-performing departments. a reduction in administrative 'bloat' (the proportion of non-academic staff), pay cuts and freezes, and cuts in spending on what they patronizingly refer to as 'grievance studies' (exemplified by race, ethnic, gender, and women's studies (Rapanta et al., 2020: 2).

The last proposal indicates that post-COVID-19 budgetary constraints in some institutions may jeopardize academic freedoms and their ability to address social challenges. Many UK universities' financial situations are also crucial, particularly those that often attract significant numbers of students, particularly "international students or that had been struggling financially before the crisis."

“...Universities UK estimates that universities in England alone might lose £3.2 billion in the 2020-21 academic year due to projected losses in fee income of 50% and 15%, respectively, from foreign student recruiting and domestic students who choose to postpone enrollment for a year (UUK 2020a).

Due to various persistent underfunding of home student tuition for many years, Scottish and Northern Irish institutions have had to subsidize their research and other operations with foreign student fee money. Concerns have been raised about the indirect impact of this revenue loss on research activities, which the Scottish Funding Council believes would cost the 18 Scottish universities £450-500 million (Scottish Government 2020: 58). The central government of the United Kingdom responded by granting mitigation financing of up to 80% of these losses to all UK institutions (DBEIS 2020). Independent assessments of “the wider COVID-19 impacts on UK universities by the Institute of Fiscal Studies” (Drayton and Waltman 2020) indicate that “nearly 10% of UK universities (13 institutions) may not be viable in the long term, necessitating government bailouts or debt restructuring to avoid insolvency”.

7 Can the institution of Higher learning be the Catalyst for Recovery and Renewal?

To understand the critical research question posed above, it is critical to discuss the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on many economies and the innovative recovery strategies. This study presents the universities as the

catalysts for Recovery and Renewal. In the discussion into recovery and renewal strategies in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, coping with the financial consequences of the epidemic, most UK institutions, to their credit, are adopting a longer perspective of their role in local and national recovery. A university, as an anchor institution, generally delivers "... economic, environmental, and cultural advantages to its community and, importantly, should play a vital role in rebalancing the economy of a stressed town and stimulating growth in a prosperous one." Wilson (2012: 73).

The UK university industry is already a success story in terms of contributing to growth and prosperity. In 2014-15, for example, universities contributed £95 billion to the UK economy and employed 944 000 people (Oxford Economics 2017). Furthermore, Holland et al. (2013) discovered that graduate talents from higher education accounted for 20% of economic development in the United Kingdom from 1982 to 2005. Furthermore, graduating students are perceived to have a significant impact on society by promoting social cohesion, trust and tolerance, and political stability (BIS 2013), including in their alma mater cities. Although the post-COVID-19 environment will have an impact on all areas, those with better incomes will be spared the most severe impacts.

However, most institutions will have some kind of interaction with communities that, even before the epidemic, faced a toxic combination of hard socioeconomic circumstances and deprivation, which unavoidably influences everyone's quality of life, particularly the life prospects of young people. Institutions can address community-based challenges in different of ways, but I cannot argue that they can easily repair the effects of decades of government neglect and austerity, especially if the government does not take "effective measures to address the many inequities and disadvantages that have become engrained in low-income communities".

However, this study argue that their function as cornerstone establishments necessitates a larger commitment, post-COVID-19, to guarantee that all segments - young and old - of their host communities are empowered to develop their resilience and capacity to recover from COVID-exacerbated societal issues. Unsurprisingly, business support is prominent in the institutions' intents, with a strong resolve to help the reinvention and revival of the Scottish economy through entrepreneurship courses, internships, and expanded facilities for incubating new enterprises. However, this very concise strategy declaration is also heavy on community and environmental action.

Recognizing that "the recession will have the greatest impact on the socioeconomically disadvantaged and the technologically excluded" (Holland et al., 2013: 2), colleges declare their "unwavering commitment to expanding access to higher education for people from underprivileged backgrounds" (ibid). This determination is matched by community-focused goals to enhance access to cultural opportunities, promote digital inclusion, and make more of their resources available to communities online.

"On the education front, they emphasize skills, with pledges to deepen ties with the college sector and to develop responsive paths and flexible courses to meet the post-COVID-19 demand for reskilling and upskilling". Undoubtedly, similar pledge-type papers will be issued by colleges throughout the world in the next year, but the rate and scope of meaningful development will be dampened by several impediments, not the least of which will be limited access to resources and financing. Partnership, a must-have element emphasized in the Academic and university strategy, will be critical to boosting the prospects of a successful response-recovery-renewal campaign.

Academic institutions have "long-established channels and vehicles for collaboration with the government and key sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, science, technology, construction, and health, as well as with other universities, and their engagement with local authorities, communities, and employers in their surrounding areas has significantly improved in recent years" (Enaifoghe, 2019: 34). However, the anticipated post-COVID-19 recession will amplify existing inequitable wealth gaps in society to record proportions as unemployment rises and household incomes fall. Low income and high unemployment rates in communities are linked to above-average levels of financial difficulty, food insecurity, health and nutrition concerns, mental illness, alcohol and drug misuse, suicide, domestic violence, dysfunctional family life, crime, and adolescent pregnancy.

Poor educational attainment and literacy levels in these localities exacerbate these issues and pose significant risks to democracy. According to Sen (2017), "illiteracy muffles people's political voices and contributes to insecurity." Young people from these groups are under-represented in higher education, notably in some industries in the United States (New York Times 2017). However, both the UK government and the university sector have long-standing policies of extending access to draw them in and to ensure they continue and complete their studies once there. However, it may be argued that broadening access as a policy, complete with various inducements, has not lived up to its promise.

Aside from certain academics' unwillingness to admit that intelligence and the capacity to profit from university education are not influenced by background, there is little overt opposition in UK institutions to enhancing and broadening access for all, young and old. Many people in the surrounding areas, however, still regard universities as august, solemn, and ultimately isolated places full of bright, aloof individuals and an 'ivory-tower' elite. The comparatively low proportion of young and older persons from disadvantaged backgrounds applying to higher

education courses may be due, in part, to institutions' lack of understanding of their interests, dispositions, and situations.

In response to Bernstein's (1970) advice to instructors to better grasp the issues generating disaffection and underachievement in schools, and not to patronize or disparage pupils, Pennacchia et al (2018) suggest that colleges must endeavor to understand the motivations of adults to study, as well as the frequently various impediments and conflicting agendas that frustrate that final step inside the university.

The threshold of initiative from university academic and professional staff bodes well for any potential flexible learning development program aimed at reaching out to non-traditional student groups such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, older adults, caregivers with limited capacity to attend campus, and learners in remote locations. In the United Kingdom, this form of practice as directed by the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA 2020) guidelines, which require the quality and standards of traditional techniques to be maintained online. Importantly, given the potential worry and stress for students in such a significant and unexpected shift in their learning, the QAA recommends that universities involve students (and staff) in the design of the adjustments and that these remain flexible and sensitive to students evolving needs.

The research says that by "Civic involvement, various town and gowns must work together on future growth." Higher education institutions have hurried to get online and create plans for their students and staff, but the towns and cities they are located in have also suffered during the coronavirus crisis. Universities will face increased pressure to participate in the post-Covid rebuilding.

8 A sustainable model in post-Covid rebuilding

A sustainable concept for post-Covid reconstruction and the fear causes knee-jerk reactions, which can lead to a derailment, with the institution being "thrown off track" or "unable to move forward" (Furnham, 2013). Individuals connected with HEIs are likely to prioritize emotional loss and strive to overcome their fear of the pandemic through risk-averse behaviours throughout the recovery period. Thus, to create a sustainable paradigm, HEIs need to focus more on resistance to change in an uncertain environment (see the Prospect Theory of Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Leaders in HEIs should use the emancipatory approach to cope with the various levels of individual risk associated with uncertainty in the post-Covid period to lessen opposition when putting ideas into effect (Fisher and Freshwater, 2015).

Given the dynamic nature of the education sector (Grady, 2020), government assistance alone is insufficient; hence, the emancipatory strategy can aid in the development of a resilience model that will bring lasting change without affecting the HEI's basic purpose and vision. According to Jones (2020), the practice of resilience by HEIs has a good impact on persons' experiences. The resilience concept also fits well with Seligman and Grove's (1970: 34) 'safety-signal' theory, that "provides the example of the bomb warning system during 1940–1941, arguing that it was so reliable that people in London continued their normal jobs without fear of dying when the sirens were silent."

People's faith in the siren system allowed them to remain calm and productive during the conflict. As a result, a resilience model should incorporate care, compassion, improved knowledge and prediction capability on the part of HEI leaders, personal accountability, defined leadership principles, and more cooperation and networking with enterprises (Clarke, 2020). These elements enable HEIs to transform people's dread into hope (Rao and Sutton, 2020). When HEIs are successful in developing a 'protective' environment through the use of such a resilience model, they might explore using 'anti-fragility'⁴ to perform better in the future (Taleb, 2012).

Finally, universities must do more after COVID-19 to promote community health and welfare, solve digital inadequacies in their host areas, and combat community ignorance that is largely sustained by inadequate education. It is not unreasonable to suggest that, over the last decade or two, insufficient education has aided populist groups in manipulating entire segments of society and undermining the basic foundations of a democratic society.

9 Conclusions

The study explored the 'new normal' introduced by the global covid-19 pandemic and the South African education post-pandemic recovery strategy. The study discussed the recovery strategies adopted by the South African institution of higher learning post-CVID-19, to understand the innovative measures used, as well as the impact of the covid-19 epidemic in South Africa. "Inequality and its various consequences were constantly fomenting discontent prior to the pandemic", with government neglect in economic investment undermining the ability of entire communities, cities, and even regions to aspire to reasonable levels of prosperity, employment, and life opportunities for their citizens.

It's no surprise that the ONS (2020) estimates that trust in government declined by 11 percentage points between fall 2018 and autumn 2019. Insidious inequity builds over time, and the resulting long-term dissatisfaction from numerous deprivations and lack of opportunity gradually begins to shatter societal cohesiveness. People are left disgruntled at best and in confrontation with the law at worst. Universities must take the lead in reviving social democracy and communal well-being.

They may do so by teaching democratic values of justice and equality in their graduating students, as well as the talents of ethical decision-making, critical thinking, collaborative working, lifelong learning, and digital literacy. This study, however, indicated that universities can and should begin engaging more meaningfully with their local host community - cognitively, culturally, and collaboratively.

It will help to necessitate the young and old in higher education, which can reduce the democratic deficit of recent decades by instilling a sense of purpose, enabling access to opportunity, and reducing the democratic deficit and increasing confidence, well-being, and independence. The debate inside universities about promoting intentional community participation has never gone away, but it has certainly waxed and waned as financial imperatives divert management' and staff's focus.

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