

PEDAGOGIES OF ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE EXTENDED CURRICULUM PROGRAMMES AMIDST COVID-19 DISRUPTIONS

P. Nyoni

Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies

University of Johannesburg

Johannesburg, South Africa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6667-4479>

ABSTRACT

The shift from contact to online classes as universities sought to ensure continuity in its academic enterprise not only happened within a context of uncertainties, hesitancy, and contestations but it had huge implications on pedagogic access and educational success for students from disadvantaged academic and social backgrounds. This article uses an ethnographic approach that draws from a combination of personal interactions with 24 participants who included 12 extended students, 4 parents, 4 academic and 4 administrative staff drawn from two South African universities, one of them in an urban and the other in a rural setting. Two key objectives feature in the article, that is how students in the extended curriculum programme have experienced online pedagogies and with what effects on their academic access and success. The article's key findings highlight how through inclusive pedagogies with a holistic focus, the influences of societal and university ethos together with teacher competencies and other features become central when exploring pedagogic access and access nuances that confront students particularly the extended students within a setting featuring disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The article further makes a case for the relevant pedagogies that can be adopted for dealing with student success issues especially under periods of disruptions. The article further highlights ways in which the move to online pedagogies has not just threatened the success of these students but the very foundations of the extended curriculum programme which aims at addressing issues of student exclusion and success. The article concludes that while the experiences of the extended students represent a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by university students in general, there is evidence that successful inclusive models are those that are holistic with a focus on addressing diverse issues associated with university teaching and learning especially when untested online pedagogies are adopted.

Key words: Extended curriculum programmes (ECPs), online pedagogies, academic access, academic success, student exclusion, inclusive models

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions aimed at curbing its spread resulted in the full

adoption of online learning while contact classes were suspended. This resulted in disruptions that inevitably called for an online pedagogical approach that is carefully planned to meet the needs of students particularly considering the sudden switch into untested teaching and learning context. While it was clear that full adoption of online learning was inevitable, it became apparent that whatever model and the level of support required to meet the demands of a humanistic inclusive and accessible pedagogy that could ensure students' academic success would be contested. The contestations thus arose out of the inequalities among the students especially with respect to the racial divide and its legacy dating back to the apartheid era (Zhou and Marongwe 2021, 176). In this case a sizeable number of students especially those from underprivileged families were always bound to feel the effects of the withdrawal of face-face classes.

It is the pedagogic experiences of students from underprivileged backgrounds that the article focuses on with specific focus on students in extended curriculum programmes (ECPs) whose recruitment into programmes deliberately target those from underprivileged family and academic backgrounds who despite meeting minimum university entry requirements would otherwise not have been successfully admitted without the ECP intervention. In pursuit of inclusive and accessible pedagogies this article engages with the concept of humanistic pedagogies that places students and their needs at its centre while transcending the significance of technological devices and embracing inclusive approaches (Strydom and De Klerk 2020). These inclusive approaches promote the historical and socio-cultural factors into context seeking pedagogical practices capable of building the requisite capital, which in this case is referred to as compensatory capital. The capital thus consists of a broad range of tangible and intangible assets that can be drawn upon by students towards championing their academic success. In efforts to explore the nature of humanising pedagogies required for online teaching and learning, the article highlights the importance of learning that is centred on nurturing relations between students and lecturers on the one hand and peer learning on the other as part of ensuring that learning is not just about using technological devices to upload curriculum content. Emphasis in this regard is on ensuring that online learning is mediated in order to ensure that some significant level of empathy and dialogue are developed as part of reasserting the human dimension (Salmi 2020, 64). The article also presents a reflection on student experiences of pedagogies and some of the limitations to e-learning especially when it is not approached from a holistic humanising angle.

In pursuit of arguments on the nature of pedagogies that are relevant for ensuring access and success of students, particularly those already experiencing precarity, the article seeks to respond to the three key questions. Firstly, the article seeks to respond to the question on what

are the requisite forms that ought to inform pedagogies of access and academic success? Secondly, is the question of how e-learning particularly its technological aspects can be mediated in order to be inclusive and accessible for enhancing student academic success. The third question relates to how the challenges associated with introduction of e-learning be mediated to ensure requisite forms of capital are developed among students and with what implications for future online educational pedagogies. In exploring the aforementioned questions the article draws from the concept of compensatory capital as propounded by Cross and Atinde (2015).

METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS – AN OVERVIEW

This article uses an ethnographic approach that draws from a combination of personal interactions with 24 participants who included 12 extended students, 4 parents, 4 academic and 4 administrative staff drawn from two South African universities, one of them in an urban and the other in a rural setting. Since the focus of the article is on how the extended students who mainly come from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds and to some extent facing academic precarity, the participants were chosen at individual capacity outside the respective institutions they attend hence the institutions are not directly named. In order to identify the 12 extended students snowballing, was used. This took the form of identifying students through their networks although the 12 had to come from diverse networks so as to avoid bias. In essence, 6 students selected attended a university in a rural setting with 3 being females while the other three were males. The 4 parents were conveniently chosen through connections of students, and these were parents who at some point had made follow-ups to provide some form of support for the students. Two of the parents were drawn from students who attended university at a rural setting while the other two were parents of students who attended university at an urban setting. In terms of academics, 2 of them worked at a university in a rural setting while the other two worked in a university located in an urban setting. The sample for administrative staff responsible for extended students was also split with 2 being located at a university in an urban setting while the other two were drawn from a university in a rural setting. The selection of participants who are academics or support staff also followed a similar snowballing format in which the researcher identified those he was familiar with as involved in the extended programme and these in turn assisted in providing a linkage with their colleagues. This approach also ensured that risks of potential participants declining participation were low while it also helped strengthen rapport, a value that is central to qualitative studies. In terms of ethical compliance, all participants took part in the study voluntarily after a detailed disclosure of the information pertaining to the study and what their obligations were. Where names are

used, these are pseudonyms that were adopted to protect the identities of participants.

It ought to be noted that in as much as a sample of 24 participants might look smaller, it remains sufficient for producing reliable and essential arguments and related conclusions especially when exploring the question of how extended students have experienced online pedagogies and with what effects on their academic success within an environment beset by disruptions particularly those linked to the COVID-19 pandemic where the situation for students in already precarious position became worse. The choice of participants from universities located in two seemingly contrasting settings, that is the urban and rural is not to directly engage in a comparative study but rather to make a case on how the question of diversity could in many regards be defined through the positionality of students, a scenario that might equally influence how they amass capital to deal with some of the challenges faced on their academic trail. The quest to explore the situation in two seemingly contrasting settings will thus show how diversity does not necessarily follow commonly existing boundaries as in some instances students located in a rural setting might have a greater resolve to amass capital and successfully deal with their precarity in the form of epistemic success and related challenges.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Compensatory capital

The concept of compensatory capital linked to the works of Cross and Atinde (2015) inform the arguments of the article. The concept was founded upon some insights on how Bourdieu (1986) theorised on of social capital especially in as far as the notion of some actors being endowed with capital that enhances their capacity to access and negotiate seemingly challenging environments in pursuit of their goals. What becomes crucial in the Bordieuan conception of capital though somewhat found problematic in this article's arguments is its assumption that in pursuit of their day-to-day goals amid struggles, some individuals lack capital to pursue their goals and thus find themselves on the margins of society. This conception poses the danger of capital being pitched at a biennial level with some form of zero some nuance which tends to miss some realities especially those associated with struggles of the marginalised.

Following the preceding arguments on the significance of acknowledging how lived struggles tend to bore some complexity that transcends one party merely requiring some form of capital in pursuit of their goals, this article highlights how extended students, a cohort that is mostly defined by the underprivileged social, economic and academic background (See Nyoni and Agbage 2021; Mutizwa et al. 2020) have displayed some resilience as they negotiated the

social, economic and academic challenges presented by the adoption of online pedagogies amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The article thus follows the arguments of Cross and Atinde (2015) who in respect to how the ideas of Bourdieu remain applicable in understanding how individual day to day struggles unfold. In this case contrast is made against the notion that the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds indicate that they occupy a weaker position in pursuit of their epistemological access compared to their counterparts from more advantaged backgrounds who enter university with requisite forms of capital that can be successfully drawn upon for epistemological success. The article argues that these usually underestimated students, in this case as represented by the cohort found in the extended curriculum programmes, possess adequate capital that draws from some form of social, cultural and one can add, *academic habitus* that enhances their epistemological success which in many seemingly unrecognised instances has been found to go beyond their advantaged counterparts. Cross and Atinde (2015) thus put emphasis on the cognitive processes that they equate to some form of pedagogy of survival in which individual persistence in settings that could be seemingly disruptive or threatening, individuals can still process, weigh and integrate different forms of capital that could play a central role in the decisions that make and ultimately influence their actions while equally determining the success of such action.

At the core of the arguments of this article is the notion that a combination of positive attitude with a student's resolve to succeed in their academic obligations, coupled with support received from friends, family and the community can significantly enhance their chances for dealing with challenges encountered within the university environment. This combination of sources of support that students can draw from can be equated to some form of essential capital in which students shape networking skills and resilience under what has come to be referred to as compensatory capital which tends to define students' actions in ensuring epistemic success especially when faced with disruptions such as those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic where they face a triple pronged risk of social, economic and epistemic exclusion.

The article's theoretical grounding is founded upon exploring how extended students negotiate and overcome the social, economic and epistemic challenges to succeed in their academic goals. In the language of Cross and Atinde (2015), student's capacity to mobilise and draw from diverse forms of networks towards building capital amid collaborating as a group sharing similar struggle situations towards ensuring epistemic inclusion; an aspect they termed the pedagogy of the marginalised, can be equated to the spirit of communitarianism that defines village life which in this article can be extended to township life in which communities support each other as they engage in day to day struggles against social and economic exclusion. While students always find campus life challenging and in some instances in conflict with some of

their values, they creatively draw from their resilience, motivation and self determination to successfully negotiate the academic environment. As Cross (2018) argued, at the centre of student's epistemic success, three cultural domains ought to combine, that is, the institutional, student and the academic. The successful integration of the three cultural domains is central to the amassing of capital that students need for overcoming epistemic and other challenges encountered within the university setting (Cross 2018). In addition to the three cultural domains, academics are said to play a central role in students struggles for epistemic access, a view that is also shared by Cross et al. (2009).

While the article seeks to highlight the ways in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds defy a wide range of challenges that lie on their way to epistemic success, it is remains important in understanding the ways that the extended students build and draw from capital ought to acknowledge their diversity and the broader diversity of the university student community at large. Appreciating the role of diversity in efforts to understand how university students particularly those from marginalised sections of society is not new and has been central to the works of many scholars beset with educational reforms in the early year of South Africa's democracy (Cross 2002; Cross 2004; Cross, Mkwanazi, and Klein 1998). In that regard, scholars sought to highlight the influence of different factors such as the family and community settings together with race, gender, culture and class define students' epistemic access and success within a university environment. What remains of significance in the pursuance of diversity does not constitute a mere recognition of the existence of diversity or understanding its meaning but grappling with how diversity influences how universities and academics together with other support structures respond to obligations to students' access and success. Diversity is a multifaceted and highly contested concept that is constantly negotiated and renegotiated as it means different things to different people in different contexts (Cross 2002; Cross et al. 2009). Such an approach to diversity needs to be understood with a realisation of the fluid nature of the concept as it tends to change from time to time something that can have far reaching consequences for student's capacity to amass capital and negotiate their academic success. It is therefore essential to note that when exploring marginalised student's experiences with epistemic success amid an environment with disruptions, diversity and its influences are closely engaged with as it remains central to how this group of students can amass capital and draw from it in pursuit of their academic goals. While all students do draw from capital including those from advantaged backgrounds, focus on those from disadvantaged backgrounds is deliberate as they tend to experience more precarity especially under conditions of disruptions such as those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXPLORING THE EXTENDED CURRICULUM PROGRAMMES (ECPs) AND THE QUESTION OF ACCESS

The extended curriculum programmes as structured in the South African context feature four models which define the way the curriculum ought to be implemented. What is important within the modelling are the diverse forms of support and pedagogic practices associated with each model. It is also essential to note that as shall be dealt with in the arguments of this article, the main objective of the extended curriculum programme is to provide students from poor social and economic background to access university education. While the admission criteria demands that a student ought to meet minimum entry requirements, without this targeted approach, it is highly unlikely that the selected students would have accessed university without such an intervention. It is for this reason that the extended curriculum programmes are usually founded on strong support mechanisms in the form of foundation provision or an extended curriculum. It is from this point that this article will adopt a definition by Borg (2009, 14–15) who upon drew from the Department of Education (DoE) policy documents where they define the Extended curriculum programme as a first degree or diploma that incorporates substantial foundational provision that is additional to curriculum content offered in the mainstream programme. Such foundation provision is usually expected to be formally planned, designed to articulate effectively with regular content of the programme while at the same time being equivalent to one or two semesters of full-time study (Rollnick 2010, 220; Garcia and Weiss 2020; Ogude et al. 2019). It is the competencies that students gain through the foundation provision that makes it essential to understand students' experiences of the pedagogic practices meant for ensuring their success at the first level and others. A weak foundation is therefore an inhibiting factor that is likely to negatively impact on students throughout their academic journey yet in some instances less attention is paid as there is a belief that the students can still do well in the later years of their careers.

Borg (2009, 14–15) raises an important issue about ECPs which also forms part of the arguments in this article in which he highlights that the key goal of the ECPs is to provide students with an alternative platform to access tertiary education. This is done through pedagogic approaches that seek to equip students with requisite academic knowledge and skills for ensuring their success. The issue of access is further raised by Nyoni and Agbaje (2021, 247) who have emphasised how issues of student's pedagogic access and their ultimate academic success within the South African setting are still defined by the historical legacy of inequalities in the distribution of social, economic and cultural capital. This argument thus further highlights the inadequacy of physical access into universities or tertiary education, which seems to have formed a greater part of the successes of post-apartheid higher education

transformation efforts. The case for a need to go beyond celebrating physical access has become even more compelling following disruptions by the COVID-19 pandemic where vulnerable student groups such as those in ECPs were pushed deeper into academic precarity where their academic success has hung in a balance. This argument thus become central for this article particularly in the case of ECPs that commonly involve students from precarious social, economic and ultimately academic backgrounds whose negotiation of pedagogic practices and the broader university culture as well as their academic success firmly depends on their pre-university experiences in the family, community and schools they would have attended. It is the ways in which such experiences shape student's struggles for pedagogic access at university and ultimately define their success and this is explored in detail in the article.

PEDAGOGIES OF ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Pedagogies of access and access are central for arguments in this article by virtue of being grounded on understanding the educational practices that are characteristic prior to students entering university spaces. Pedagogies for access will thus broadly be understood as a wide range of learning experiences that students encounter at various levels that include formal and informal knowledge acquisition practices and strategies located in families, communities, their previous schools as well as the university environment in its entirety. By taking such a stance on the explanation of pedagogic access, the article seeks to highlight a holistic focus that seeks to understand university learning as a complex practice that cannot be narrowed down to lecturer-student interactions. One therefore must explore the identities of the students, lecturers, support staff as well as the institutions themselves as a combination of all these influence a student's struggles for pedagogic access and academic success. It is from this lens that the issue of pedagogic access is assessed particularly looking at the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had disruptive impacts on the individuals, communities and universities.

EXPLAINING THE CONCEPT OF E-LEARNING

E-learning has been central to teaching and learning strategies adopted by universities particularly in the advent of the disruptions to the academic programme that took place following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. When it comes to understanding the meaning of e-learning, it is essential to note that despite an absence of a common definition on what e-learning means, with some researchers presenting it as synonymous to online, virtual or network and web-based learning there is consensus that it involves the intentional use of networked information and communication technology in teaching and learning (Arkorful and Abaidoo 2014; Chitra and Raj 2018). The concept of e-learning as used in this article shall thus

be founded upon the commonly used definition that views e-learning as intentional use of networked information and communication technology in teaching and learning. This shall include online or virtual learning in its different forms.

REIMAGINING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AMID A PERIOD OF DISRUPTION

The COVID-19 pandemic induced disruptions particularly within the social, economic and academic settings call for an inclusive and responsive pedagogy founded upon a new approach to education. New pedagogical approaches ought to embrace diversity with stakeholders involved at various levels of students' education being deeply entrenched in a spirit of cooperation and trust with a common goal of ensuring students' academic success (UNESCO 2021, 50). It is important therefore to ensure that acknowledgement of diversity and related forms of support a student requires to succeed in their academic obligations receives a firm foundation from the family, while extending to the community before a similar spirit of support, cooperation and commitment is built within the university environment both inside and outside the curriculum (Van Voorhis et al. 2013). In the work of many scholars family involvement in education has mainly been emphasized as associated with basic education especially at the lower tiers of education something that seem to underestimate the value of family and community involvement for supporting students in universities (Van Voorhis et al. 2013; Goudeau et al. 2021). It is such a spirit of cooperation that draws from support by family, friends and the community which when integrated with support within the university in the form of available support structures including academics define the nature and magnitude of capital that a student requires to succeed. It can also be argued that effective pedagogy mainly gets shaped under conditions of interdependence and interconnectedness.

At the core of the shaping of the pedagogy are the merging relationships between parents and students, students and other community members, students and their networks and notably relations between the students and academics. The way these relations are mediated also speaks to how relationships are shaped within the broader world with influences on the resultant nature of capital which then define their success in the academic goals (UNESCO 2021). It is thus important to note that such an integrated and holistic form of capital is essential particularly under instances of a disruption. The relational nature of pedagogies required particularly under disruptions and where students from disadvantaged backgrounds are involved is summed up as follows:

“Numbers without narratives, connectivity without cultural inclusion, information without

empowerment, and digital technology in education without clear purposes, are not desirable” (UNESCO 2021, 37).

The above quote not only puts emphasis on the relational nature of pedagogy but it can be further interpreted as being part of a broader way in which pedagogical emphasis on the significance of the encounters between students and educators. It is essential to take note that the teaching and learning process is two way as both students and educators learn from each other. The need for a close relationship between educators and students as highlighted on the above quote emphasises the significance of educational practices that are inclusive (Strydom and De Klerk 2020, 72). Such educational practices thus ought to be conscious of the need to embrace narratives through a dialogical form of teaching and learning practices in which knowledge flows in both the academic to student and vice versa direction as opposed to a unidirectional one. Such a dialogical approach equally rests upon a teaching and learning approach that is sensitive to cultural inclusion while embracing digital technologies and information sharing that is grounded on clear educational and empowerment goals. As the UNESCO (2021, 51) report further asserts, such approaches can be achieved when educational pedagogies are founded upon being conscious of avoiding human exceptionalism and possessive individualism that normally act against a spirit of reciprocity, care and recognition of interdependencies among individuals and groups within and beyond the university environment.

It is the inclusive, relational pedagogy capable of bringing forth a humanistic spirit of teaching and learning that the article finds suitable for the COVID-19 context where the influence of disruptions within society in its generic terms inevitably impacted on university programmes. It is from such a humanistic angle that at theoretical level emphasis of arguments in this article is put on understanding teaching and learning pedagogies that embrace inclusivity and diversity within a broad range of combination of individual experiences that transcend society but equally define educator student and other forms of support structures in a university setting. At a level of educator-student interaction particularly under a setting afflicted by COVID-19 related disruptions, a humanistic and inclusive teaching and learning pedagogical approach ought to entail practices linked to module design and its teaching with the educator demonstrating genuine care for students that allows flexibility depending on their diverse experiences.

While one might ask what genuine care entails especially in the absence of any quantitative measurement, it can be argued that wherever a humanistic and inclusive element of teaching and learning pedagogies exist, particularly in practice in university spaces it is

clearly manifest in the day-to-day interactions of students with a wide range of actors who include family, community, academics and others who provide support to the academic programme. It is thus important to note that with teaching and learning under the COVID-19 pandemic being characterised by higher incidences of trauma, uncertainty coupled by introduction of rapid changes in technological devices student support ought to broadly involve family, community, support from academics and other university support structuring in a manner deeply rooted on trust and empathy. In reality this means avoiding the usual negative tendencies mainly linked to portrayal of students as not making enough effort while leaving academics as “saints” who would have done all they are required to do in support of students. As highlighted by Strydom and De Klerk (2020, 72), at the centre of humanistic and inclusive teaching and learning pedagogies particularly within a university student educational setting where students from marginalised backgrounds are involved, it is important to embrace a holistic approach that brings all interested parties together.

This article further argues that reflections on what best pedagogical practices and challenges exist within a period of disruption, ought to be extended to putting into scrutiny what academics and other university support services do in ensuring that students get the requisite support for developing enough compensatory capital that might enable them to negotiate the challenging societal and academic environment in particular for them to succeed academically. This is in addition to the need to understand the nature and effectiveness of the forms of support manifest in the families and communities where students come from as such experience inevitably influences their academic success. It is therefore from such a holistic vantage point that this article explores how student success during a period of disruptions tends to get individual and institutional influence from family, community, academics and other university support structures. This is in addition to issues to do with the identities of the students themselves and what forms of compensatory or other capital they possess to deal with the situation they find themselves.

ADOPTION OF E-LEARNING AMID UNCERTAINTIES, HESITANCY, AND CONTESTATIONS

Following restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, universities in South Africa as was the case across the globe engaged in strategies aimed at ensuring that the academic programme especially teaching and learning could forge ahead. It is within this period that most universities in South Africa found themselves in the middle of uncertainty mainly because most of their academic programmes were not just used to being conducted through contact, but the universities had been caught by surprise by the pandemic and the speed and magnitude of

restrictions introduced by the government in efforts to curb its spread. It is thus important to note that its not only the universities and government that were thrown into some form of uncertainty, but students were also gripped by the fear of the unknown and as it remained unclear what best strategies adopted by universities could be suitable for ensuring pedagogic access and enhancing their chances of success. It is for this reason that negotiations on the form of e-learning and related support universities could possibly adopt would be found acceptable to the student community. As per prediction by Amemado (2020, 13), the nature of the contestations surrounding a mandatory adoption of e-learning particularly at the inception of the pandemic linked disruptions cast doubt on its full adoption as are placement of contact teaching and learning in future. At best there could be a broader adoption of e-learning as an integral part of university education. What is apparent within South Africa's higher education, however were the marked divisions not just among different universities but fault lines emerged among the students, across university management, government and academics themselves. Emergent differences were mainly centered on issues of access to requisite technologies, training and other forms of support that could guarantee access and success to the academic programme without excluding certain segments of the academic or student population. When one looks closely into the disparities, the influence of the historical legacy that mainly manifested itself through inequalities mainly based on racial lines come to the fore. Understanding the inequalities manifests along racial lines and how these can be overcome is thus essential in efforts aimed at building the requisite compensatory capital among students.

Introduction of e-learning particularly within the early period revealed how any good practices associated with it transcended technology. This implies that e-learning technological tools such as digital libraries, learning management systems or artificial intelligence-driven software ought to be viewed as convenient tools meant for facilitating e-learning (Salmi 2020, 64). The essential aspect in the argument of Salmi, is that at the fore of successful e-learning is the adaptation of the curriculum, pedagogic practices and assessments in ways that enable students' success while at the same time tackling broader institutional requirements when it comes to student academic, social and financial needs. It becomes this combination that therefore underscores establishment and reinforcement of strong compensatory capital among students and in the process ensure successful implementation of e-learning particularly within a context of the COVID-19 related disruptions. Successful e-learning ought to also go beyond merely posting recordings of traditional lecture materials on e-learning platforms. Instead, as highlighted by Salmi (2020) the effectiveness of e-learning is defined by embracing teaching and learning pedagogies that actively provoke enthusiasm in ways that make their pedagogic experiences enjoyable while at the same time being academically accessible for ensuring their

academic success. Equally the nature of support from support services cannot be in isolation of the core demands of the curriculum as its effectiveness mainly relies on how well integrated and articulated it is for meaningful contribution towards the development of students' compensatory capital.

The two universities upon which this article is based were not spared the aforementioned complexities that surrounded the adoption of online learning. The institution located in the rural setting struggled with implementation of online learning such that even after its adoption, in reality little or no learning took place. Pedagogic access was thus reduced to a pipedream for students in the institution. It is important to note that the issue of inequality in access to e-learning cannot be reduced to inter-institutional diversity. Rather accessibility of e-learning became manifest at intra-institutional level, something which became manifest in the frequent protests in particular by students who felt excluded by the system in place for distributing learning devices or providing other forms of support suitable for enhancing their pedagogic access within a pandemic setting. The feeling among the group of students who took part in protests was that the system failed to make e-learning accessible as it deepened their precarity and left them vulnerable to academic failure and ultimate exclusion. It became apparent therefore that despite the adoption of e-learning, this is by no means a reflection of an end to the uncertainty, hesitancy and contestations that characterized the introduction of e-learning as they have to-date remained entrenched onto students' struggles for pedagogic access as they negotiate through a learning setting made complex by the pandemic. Before delving into other arguments linked to how students, especially those in extended programmes have negotiated pedagogic access, it is important to present an overview on some of the key features of the e-learning programme adopted by the two universities in question. The article goes beyond merely stating the advantages of some of the key features of online learning by highlighting its influences on pedagogical access and ultimate success of students in particular those in extended programmes who have been found to be in more precarious positions.

At the core of the significance of adopting e-learning has been the advantage of having to avoid physical contact while ensuring that the educational needs of students are met. In this regard, students and academics in both the rural and urban settings concurred that e-learning has been beneficial as it has permitted student-lecturer pedagogic encounters with a high degree of flexibility. In essence, they found the interaction through e-learning platforms commonly used in the two institutions such as blackboard to be a positive step towards embracing humanistic pedagogies as it allowed knowledge suitable for individual students to be delivered while at the same time a greater degree of flexibility was ensured as learning materials were readily accessible to students without the need for them to travel to attend classes physically.

Students could also access materials at anytime they needed to. A related and widely celebrated issue of importance when it comes to the adoption of e-learning relates to improvements in lecturer-student and student to student communication which has been linked to the adoption of technological devices (Kadhila and Nyambe 2020; Arkorful and Abaidoo 2015). It is for this reason that the section or the article that follows deals with some of the uncertainties that emerged following the adoption of e-learning with specific focus on students in the extended curriculum programmes.

Uncertainties and challenges related to the adoption of e-learning

Despite the careful planning by universities as they prepared for accessible pedagogic practices to mitigate the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic challenges have persisted with students from poorer backgrounds being more vulnerable. It is important however to note that while this remains celebrated for its cost and time effectiveness as widely reported in the work of some scholars, it has remained a challenge to a considerable number of students especially those in the extended programmes who come from poorer backgrounds and in many instances do not have access to learning and communication devices (Kadhila and Nyambe 2020; Hodges et al. 2020). This has created room for exclusion within what might be celebrated as a foundation for enhancing pedagogical access. Several students shared their experiences of lack of learning devices which for many seem to be worsened by a lack of a conducive environment for studying. One male student, Xolelwa, in one such conversation which represents many students in a similar situation of lacking access to learning devices had this to say:

“Things are difficult for me because I don’t have a laptop or even a smartphone. To do my work I have to borrow a laptop from my neighbor and sometimes they are busy with it. While contact sessions have begun and I appreciate this, the time one gets on the computers is too limited and it takes too many sessions to finish a task and we have many of them, its not just one Module.” (Interview with an extended student in a university in an urban area, February 2022).

It is clear that Xolelwa’s case of lack of access to e-learning and communication devices, while representing many students from poor backgrounds does expose some of the interventions by institutions as not being appreciative of student diversity especially in as far as students from poor backgrounds are concerned. Interventions well celebrated to broaden pedagogic access thus need closer scrutiny as they may indirectly limit the very access they purport to enhance.

It is also important to understand that in many instances universities and even families tended to reduce student educational needs to provision of devices. In many instances this has seen the personal interactions between lecturers and students being drastically reduced or

sometimes totally eliminated as physical contact is viewed as posing a risk of spreading the COVID-19 pandemic. In the absence of physical interaction students are required to have strong motivation and time management skills that can aid them to maintain confidence and be able to succeed in the academic goals. During conversations with student participants, they concurred that studying through e-learning has had more harm than good as in some instances a mere physical encounter with a lecturer or any person providing learning support enhances the learning environment. As highlighted in the arguments by of Kadhila and Nyambe (2020), student participants also felt that learning is much easier during face to face interactions with lecturers as there is more time for clarification, explanations and interpretation of issues unlike with the e-learning method. E-learning tends to also limit students' space for sharing knowledge with others, something that might negatively impact on their social and skill sharing knowledge. It is also important to note that lecturers also seemed to overwhelmingly support contact sessions not just for lecturers but for assessments as well. They bemoaned high incidences of academic dishonesty and cheating ever since e-learning was adopted and strongly advocated for physical contact. It can therefore be concluded that e-learning is complex contrary to some perceptions that it makes learning easier and more accessible.

What is key in understanding challenges associated with adoption of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, is the influences of the challenges on students' capacity to develop compensatory capital for negotiating the complex university environment particularly their academic obligations. It is for this reason that students, lecturers and support staff in the two universities in question highlighted how some challenges such as access to requisite devices, connectivity, poor infrastructure continue to negatively impact on efforts to ensure that accessible and sustainable pedagogic practices are established for ensuring student academic success.

CONCLUSION – MAKING A CASE FOR RELEVANT PEDAGOGIES UNDER PERIODS OF DISRUPTIONS

The article has established how university learning has rapidly been transformed following the adoption of e-learning as part of measures to ensure continuity in the academic programme. The South African higher education context remains unique when it comes to understanding the implications of the adoption of e-learning as the country still grapples with the historical legacy that where inequalities are still mainly defined along racial lines. It is within this context that different actors within the university community particularly students have had to maneuver as they built capital in efforts to navigate through the somewhat complex university environment in pursuit of academic success.

The disruptions brought by the COVID-19 have called for new pedagogic practices that are capable of ensuring both academic access and success of students. The article established that it is humanistic, holistic and student centered pedagogies that could ensure a sustainable form of compensatory capital is developed among students particularly those from marginalized backgrounds as is the case with students in the extended curriculum programmes. While the experiences of the extended students to represent a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by university students in general, there is evidence that successful inclusive models are those that are holistic with a focus on addressing diverse issues associated with university teaching and learning especially when untested online pedagogies are adopted. The celebration of technology as part of the educational practices particularly in a setting characterized by marked disruptions calls for some form of humanistic mediation that will ensure that in efforts towards developing accessible and inclusive pedagogies, all actors involved in the education of students who range from family, community and the university become conscious of the fact that technology is merely an essential foundation of the pedagogical practices associated with e-learning. The effectiveness of the pedagogies thus lies in the relevance, constructiveness, capacity for embracing interactiveness while ensuring that students have choice to define their learning needs suitable for ensuring their academic success.

In terms of what the future of e-learning educational pedagogies might hold, it can be argued that while use of technology is likely to increase, it is not possible that e-learning could be made mandatory to the extent of replacing contact classes. There is a greater possibility for integration of technology into educational pedagogies with contact learning remaining an important part of university education. There is also a possibility of contestations on what forms of pedagogic practices are suitable for developing capital that can sustain student success particularly considering that disruptions either by the COVID pandemic or other life changing variabilities likely to occur.

REFERENCES

- Amemado, Dodzi. 2020. "COVID-19: An Unexpected and Unusual Driver to Online Education, The Global Picture." *International Higher Education* 102: 12–14.
- Arkorful, Valentina and Nelly Abaidoo. 2014. "The role of e-learning, the advantages and disadvantages of its adoption in Higher Education." *International Journal of Education and Research* 2(12): 397–410. <https://dx.doi.org/10.21839/jaar.2018.v3S1.158>.
- Borg, Dorinda R. 2009. "The effects of the extended curriculum programme on the social identity of students." PhD dissertation.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. "The forms of capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education Richardson*, ed. J. Westport, 241–258. CT: Greenwood.
- Chitra, A. Pauline and Antony M. Raj. 2018. "E-Learning". *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research* 3(Suppl. 1) (April): S11–S13. <https://dx.doi.org/10.21839/jaar.2018.v3S1.158>.
- Cross, Michael and Vivian Atinde. 2015. "The Pedagogy of the Marginalized: Understanding How

- Historically Disadvantaged Students Negotiate Their Epistemic Access in a Diverse University Environment.” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37(4): 308–325.
- Cross, Michael, Yael Shalem, Judy Backhouse, and Fatima Adam. 2009. “How Undergraduate Students ‘Negotiate’ Academic Performance within a Diverse University Environment.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 23(1): 21–42. doi: 10.4314=sajhe.v23i1.44800.
- Cross, Michael, Zanele Mkwanazi, and Gillian Klein. (Ed.). 1998. *Dealing with Diversity: The Politics of Curriculum in South Africa*. Cape Town, Juta.
- Cross, Michael. 2002. “Institutionalising Campus Diversity in South Africa Higher Education: Review of Diversity Scholarship and Diversity Education.” *Higher Education* 1(2): 1–24.
- Cross, Michael. 2004. “Institutionalizing Campus Diversity in South Africa Higher Education: Review of Diversity Scholarship and Diversity Education.” *Higher Education* 47(4): 387–410.
- Cross, Michael. 2018. “Steering epistemic access in higher education in South Africa: Institutional dilemmas / Michael Cross”. – 1a ed. – Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO.
- García, Emma and Elaine Weiss. 2020. *COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding Report*. Economic Policy Institute, Washington, DC.
- Goudeau, Sébastien, Camille Sanrey, Arnaud Stanczak, Antony Manstead, and Céline Darnon. 2021. *Nature Human Behaviour* 5(October): 1273–1281.
- Hodges, Charles, Stephanie Moore, Barb Lockee, Torrey Trust, and Aaron Bond. 2020. “The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning.” *V-Tech Works* 27 March. vtechworks.lib.vt.edu. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>.
- Kadhila, Ngepathimo and John Nyambe. 2020. “Barriers to the Quality of Emergency Online Pedagogies in Higher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study from the University of Namibia.” *Journal of Learning for Development* 8(3): 516–531. <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3989>.
- Mutizwa Mukute, Buhle Francis, Jane Burt, and Ben de Souza, 2020. “Education in Times of COVID-19: Looking for Silver Linings in Southern Africa’s Educational Responses.” *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* 36. DOI 10.4314/sajee.v36i1.7.
- Nyoni, Phefumula and Olaide Agbaje. 2021. “Myths Surrounding the Extended Curriculum in South Africa’s Higher Education Sector.” In *Transformative Curricula, Pedagogies and Epistemologies*, 239–253. Leiden/ Boston: Brill.
- Ogude, Nthabiseng Audrey, I. J. Meyer, Jeanine Mwambakana, and N. E. Mthethwa. 2019. “Can extended curriculum programmes be improved through engagement with students using appreciative inquiry?” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 33(4): 219–236.
- Rollnick, Marissa. 2010. *Identifying potential for equitable access to tertiary level science: Digging for gold*. Milton Keynes: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Salmi, Jamil. 2020. “Coping with the Present while Building a More Equitable Future.” Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/ar/2020/eng/downloads/imf-annual-report-2020.pdf>.
- Strydom, Sonja and Mine de Klerk. 2020. “Humanizing Pedagogies During a Time of Disruption and Transition a time for reconsideration.” In *About Universal Design for Learning*, ed. Sonja Strydom, Nicoline Herman, Hanelie Adendorff, and Miné De Klerk. <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>.
- UNESCO see United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2021. *UNESCO Report. Reimagining, Our Futures Together: A new social contract for education*. Place de Fontenoy, Paris, France.
- Van Voorhis, Frances L., Michelle F. Maier, Joyce L. Epstein, and Chrishana M. Lloyd. 2013. *The Impact of Family Involvement on the Education of Children Ages 3 to 8. A Focus on Literacy and Math Achievement Outcomes and Social-Emotional Skills*. MDRC.