MENTORING PRACTICE IN THE FOURTH INDUSTRY REVOLUTION: A SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafl-2024-31-28

RAMHURRY Runash
Department of Languages, Cultural Studies and Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities
University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
runashr@uj.ac.za

Abstract: In the absence of face-to-face mentoring, the study investigates the difficulties newly hired academics have assimilating into a Higher Education Institution (HEI), a university in Johannesburg, and how electronic mentoring strategies promote these newcomers' social learning. The study used an interpretivist paradigm with discourse-oriented interviews as the main data collection instrument to collect data from 20 recently hired academic staff members who were in their first two years of their academic careers at a South African university. The study found that by utilizing resources from the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), such as YouTube, Ted Talks, and WhatsApp, to improve their social learning, novices were able to smoothly make the move into academia. The study suggests that educational institutions investigate conceptual issues related to electronic mentoring and its advantages for and its benefits for both the institution and the newly appointed lecturers. In addition to promoting decolonisation and creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment in the context of higher education in Africa, social media mentoring offers strategic 4IR tools that have the potential to expand and enhance mentoring practices at institutions. Because social learning could close the digital gap and facilitate newcomers' integration into academia, it holds significant implications for higher education in Africa.
Keywords: Mentoring, Novice Lecturers, Social Media, Electronic Mentoring, Social Learning

Introduction

This research examines novice lecturers' experiences integrating into university life amid a backdrop of difficult conditions. Recent advancements in South Africa's HE sectors have posed a plethora of obstacles for new instructors, which has been exacerbated by the expanding higher education landscape, as well as free and instant access to knowledge. As a result, the emphasis has shifted to the Internet's broad collaborative learning approaches (Krishnannair, Krishnannair & Krishnannair, 2021). Electronic mentoring has transformed mentoring methods in higher education in the Digital Age. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have changed how mentors and mentees communicate, making it simpler to connect and collaborate in real time. In Africa, decoloniality is a pressing issue that requires a new system of knowledge production that is grounded in local perspectives and experiences. This paper explores how social media mentoring, particularly WhatsApp, can advance decoloniality in African higher education and the implications of social learning for higher education in Africa.

Adding impetus to the higher education landscape, the Coronavirus pandemic and (in some quarters) "…the strain to embrace 4IR have consolidated to create new and remarkable issues for the scholarly community, influencing both workforce and understudies" (Hedding, Greve, Breetzke, Nel & Van Vuuren, 2020, p.1). Furthermore, power shifts and traditional mentoring techniques have been challenged, and novel solutions, such as e-

mentoring, appear to have substituted traditional dyadic mentoring interactions. Thus, research energy has turned its focus by shifting the emphasis from how individuals learn on their own to social learning. Indeed, faculty members must learn from one another in order to put their knowledge into practice (Knight et al., 2006). However, due to unforeseen circumstances and, more recently, the COVID-19 epidemic, colleagues are not readily available. Indeed, in the current COVID-19 milieu, "…the boundary between educator preparation and ongoing professional development of educators has been increasingly blurred" (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020, p.460).

Problem statement and purpose

Extant research claims that informal learning practices are an essential, but underused, route that considerably aids in the social learning of beginning lecturers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004; Coffield, 2000, in McNally, Blake & Reid, 2009). Indeed, there is a paucity of research on informal mentorship practices, mediated by social media platforms (SMP) and how they contribute to the social learning of novice lecturers as academics in South African university landscape. It is within this knowledge gap, that this paper locates itself, guided by an overarching research question: How do mentoring practices mediated by social media platforms advance the social learning of novice lecturers in a university setting?

Literature Review

Social learning has been identified as a critical aspect that has the potential to improve higher education in Africa. Olabisi and Tella (2020) define social learning as the process through which individuals learn from one another through interaction and collaboration. Social media platforms have considerably aided social learning by allowing students and professors to communicate with one another, share ideas, and cooperate on projects. Furthermore, social media technologies like blogs, wikis, and discussion forums have been utilized to facilitate online collaborative learning. Indeed, the utility and ubiquitous nature of social media platforms for social learning has significant implications for higher education in Africa since it provides a practical means of bridging the digital divide and increasing access to education.

The repercussions of social learning for higher education in Africa are far-reaching. One of the primary advantages is that it offers a chance to increase student engagement and superior educational results. Overall, social learning has the potential to transform higher education in Africa by providing students and neophytes with access to new learning opportunities and enabling them to acquire those skills they require for success in a rapidly changing world. Olabisi and Tella (2020) define social learning as the process by which individuals learn from each other through interaction and collaboration. Social media platforms have facilitated social learning by providing students and faculty with an opportunity to connect with peers, share ideas, and collaborate on projects. Indeed, higher education in Africa will be significantly impacted by the use of social media for social learning since it offers affordable and sustainable solutions to close the digital gap. In addition, social media platforms such as blogs, wikis, and discussion forums have been used to support online collaborative learning. Decolonisation and decoloniality are pressing issues in African higher education, and social learning may offer a way to advance these movements. Nangia and Ford (2021) define decolonisation as the dismantling of

systems and structures of colonialism that perpetuate inequality and marginalisation in African higher education. Traditionally, "early-career faculty members engage multiple "mentoring partners" in non-hierarchical, collaborative, cross-cultural partnerships (and informal relationships) to build strong networks to address specific areas of faculty activity, such as research, teaching, working toward tenure, and striking a work-life balance" (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007, p.1). This lends credence to the idea that associating with more experienced and successful colleagues who may guide and ease new lecturers into academic life might help prevent isolation and adverse outcomes.

The argument that appropriates casual or accidental interactions with colleagues are essential for lecturers' growth as academics is reinforced by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004, in Warhurst, 2008). Due to the growing popularity of social media sites like WhatsApp, YouTube, Ted Talks, and others, these encounters have in fact entered the digital era. The development of virtual communities of practice (VCoP) has also been accelerated by online 2.0 technology, which has made online platforms more dynamic (Jokisalo & Riu, 2009; Gülbahar, 2014; Susilo, 2014). But there are several issues with this technique. Despite worries that virtual arrangements may result in diminished possibilities for faculty growth, there is evidence that virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) with a distinct structure and institutional support, offer a wide range of options for faculty development (Sherer, Shea & Kristensen, 2003), allaying fears that virtual arrangements may lead to a lack of engagement (inter alia, a reluctance to share, privacy concerns, and fear of criticism) and, as a result, foster a sense of community (Ardichvili, Page & Wetling, 2003). Indeed, e-mentoring is a viable alternative to more traditional forms of mentoring, and it may be assist newcomers in their quest to assimilate into the academe. Furthermore, it reinforces Smith and Israel's (2010, p.30) argument that "the use of computer-mediated communications such as e-mail, discussion boards, chat rooms, blogs, Web conferencing, and growing Internet-based solutions are changing the way mentors and mentees interact." Indeed, the objective of virtual or e-mentoring is to replicate the best practices of traditional mentoring while mediating these trends in a digital environment, with academics flourishing and compensating for a lack of "physical co-presence" and the privacy required for "conversations about sensitive issues" (Pachler & Redondo, 2012, in Mullen, 2016, 113).

E-mentoring has now assumed primacy and may displace traditional forms of mentoring, particularly cogent considering the circumstances stipulated by COVID-19. This incarnation of mentorship practice has been drastically altered and revolutionized as a result of the coronavirus pandemic (Nocco, McGill, MacKenzie, Tonietto, Dudney, Bletz & Kuebbing, 2021). E-mentoring or virtual mentoring, which is remarkably similar to face-to-face mentoring, includes two or more people working in a mentoring relationship, but geographically separated at times (Owen, 2014). E-mentoring, on the other hand, may provide for greater flexibility in developing and sustaining ties; mentors are not confined to certain geographic locations, and more individuals may participate. Furthermore, fewer social cues may be employed in electronic media, providing women and minorities with more opportunities to contact mentors (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003). In Africa, this notion will surely gain traction amongst the previously disadvantaged academics.

Not only affording previously disadvantaged academics access to these social media platforms, but it is hoped, will add impetus to decolonialisation of higher education in South Africa. Indeed, social media has become an important platform for academics to

share their research and ideas with a wider audience, and it can help to raise awareness of the issues related to decolonialisation (De Wet & Hartell, 2020). Further, social media platforms provide an opportunity for neophytes to participate in online discussions with other academics and students about decolonialisation in higher education. It has been opined that social media can be used to foster dialogue and create a sense of community around the issue of decolonialization (Nkomo, 2017).

Novice lecturers/academics can use WhatsApp as a platform to promote decoloniality by establishing a network of peers and engaging in collaborative learning. By doing so, they can overcome the power relationships inherent in traditional mentoring dyads and create a space for critical dialogue and collective action. Novice academics can use social media to advocate for change in higher education institutions, such as calling for the diversification of curricula and the recruitment of more black academics. According to Mwesige and Ssenyonga (2018), social media can be used to create pressure for institutional change and to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable policies and practices.

Further, virtual mentorship also coheres for other important factors that impact on academics. Indeed, according to experts, virtual mentoring may help neophytes and experienced faculty alike to overcome time restrictions and busy work schedules, therefore preserving long-term mentorship traditions. Additionally, mentees have access to a wider range of mentors thanks to the ease of e-mentoring than they may have at work. The argument that modern technology advancements, including real-time rich multimedia communication, enable social bonding and emotional expression that are often exhibited in face-to-face encounters is supported by further data (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003).

Due to their chaotic work schedules and/or the social isolation brought on by COVID-19, mentors and mentees are now able to take the lead in the creation of virtual communities of practice (vCoP) (Stewart, 2010). These online communities of practice promote communication and knowledge exchange among newcomers as well as between experts and beginners. Opportunities exist in a vCoP for reverse mentorship, as neophytes mentor their more seasoned co-workers while simultaneously being retrained and revitalized (Murphy, 2012). In fact, VCoPs may be seen as an avant-garde approach to faculty development that fosters community building and collaborative learning (Yang, O'Reilly & Houghton, 2020). According to Malecela (2016), VCoPs promote online community involvement and collaborative learning through social media. Social media's rise has made real-time communication and community cooperation feasible (Amry, 2014).

In their research, Boyinbode, Agbonifo and Ogundare (2017) draw the conclusion that WhatsApp application can significantly enhance educational activities. This study, although conducted in Nigeria, has ramifications for the entire African continent. These researchers concluded that WhatsApp is more suitable to support educational activities in mobile learning environments due to its multimedia content (ibid, 2017). WhatsApp's popularity varies widely, including accessibility, near-natural conversational flow, a sense of community, low cost (an important standard for Africa), and user-friendliness to communicate (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). Additionally, the group sharing feature of WhatsApp, which enables the exchange of photographs, audio, video, text messages, and website links among groups, contributes to the app's adaptability (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Sayan, 2016).

The usage of WhatsApp is congruent with the principles of social constructivist learning theory, which prioritizes social interactions above observation (Vygotsky, 1978). The

usage of WhatsApp adheres to the principles of social constructivist learning theory, which stresses the significance of social interactions above observation (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Ujakpa, Heukelman, Lazarus, Neiss and Rukanda (2018), WhatsApp may also be used to send photographs, attach media files, connect websites, and permit file sharing. In fact, WhatsApp permits the transmission of academic content among inexperienced faculty members (Ujakpa et al., 2018). Further, according to Ujakpa et al. (2018), WhatsApp may also be used to send photographs, attach media files, connect websites, and permit file sharing. In fact, WhatsApp permits the transmission of academic content amongst inexperienced faculty (Ujakpa, et al., 2018). Indeed, mentorship is necessary for academic performance (Darwin & Palmer, 2009). This is the ideal scenario; however, many mentors are not constantly accessible. Online advisors (also known as electronic advisors) provide a workaround in this situation. Virtual mentoring, like the conventional variation of the face-to-face mentoring strategy, attempts to support academics' professional growth largely using computer-mediated communication technologies (Cinkara et al., 2017, p.40).

E- mentoring expands on traditional forms of mentoring. Since online mentoring is time and place-independent, exposure to a large cohort of colleagues teaching similar or related fields of study can be helpful for busy newcomers. Interestingly, all of these ideas coalesce around Kram's (1996) idea of 'connectedness', but there is more to it than she could have imagined - the connectivity provided by social networking associations, especially WhatsApp. According to Kram (1996), "personal learning" is the process of acquiring information, abilities, or competences that facilitate personal growth, including social skills like "...self-reflection," "self-expression," "active listening," "empathy," and "feedback." These characteristics support the frequently cited idea of a higher sense of oneself as "as increasingly connected with others" (Kram, 1996, p.140). Instead of the typical mentorship connections, WhatsApp captures these concepts and provides a novel method of connecting academics. Additionally, according to Boyinbode et al. (2017), e-learning and mobile learning offer methods to mitigate conventional education's deficiencies. Indeed, social learning through social media platforms like WhatsApp can provide numerous opportunities for novice lecturers or academics to integrate into the academe. WhatsApp is a widely used social media platform in Africa, with over 250 million active users (Kobie, 2019). The platform offers a convenient and accessible way for individuals to connect, collaborate, and share knowledge with others in their social network. In this context, social learning through WhatsApp can be particularly effective for novice lecturers or academics who are seeking to develop their teaching practices and establish themselves in the academe.

Theoretical Framework

The study is predicated upon two different assumptions. First, social constructivism is used as a general framework to underlie Mentoring theory (Kram, 1985), especially the Lave and Wenger’s (2002) learning model. Lave and Wenger (1990) embraced the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) as a method for individuals to obtain knowledge in their communities, using a constructivist approach to learning and development. This concept argues that as people integrate into a group or society, they accumulate knowledge. Once inside, individuals begin to speak and think in the manner of that group. Thus, a new

lecturer learns to be an academic by employing symbols and behaviours prevalent within academia.

This article pointedly then, discusses the appropriation of social media platforms, with a focus on WhatsApp as an e-mentoring tool for beginner teachers, framed within the theoretical framework of constructivism and Lave and Wenger's model of learning (2002). According to the latter mentioned theory, learning occurs when a person joins a community as an "insider" and begins to use the language and perspectives of that community. Situated learning theory provides an ideal context for examining the social appropriation of university learning. The article argues for a movement away from personal focus to highlighting the great value of others in one's learning process.

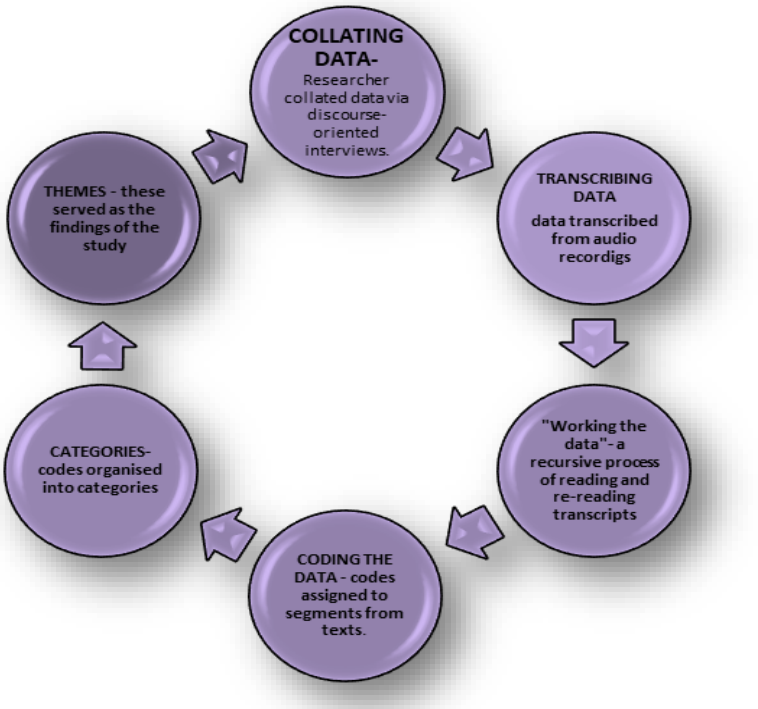
Research Methodology

The study espoused a qualitative research design, primarily because it was consistent with the objectives of this survey: a qualitative strategy buttressed by the constructivist philosophy, which views reality as a social construct that interacts on many levels (Merriam, 1998). For this study, such a strategy has facilitated an in-depth analysis of the world of social life among novice lecturers. The constructivist ideology, which perceives reality as a social construct that interacts on multiple levels (Merriam, 1998), informed the use of a qualitative research methodology since it was aligned with the study's objectives, and cogently permitted an in-depth investigation of the realm of social life among neophytes.

Data Collation

Discourse-oriented interviews were the main tool used to collate data from the participants. In line with Creswell's (2002) conceptual terms, a purposeful sampling technique was employed to choose a group of 20 inexperienced lecturers for an interview- to determine if mentoring practices (or a lack thereof) support or undermine the development of university lecturers. Their comments yielded an array of narratives, which were examined to find themes pertaining to their academic development.

Data Analysis



A Recursive process that occurred simultaneously

Figure 1: The qualitative process of data analysis (modified from Creswell 2002, 2017; Henning et al., 2004)

Discourse and Thematic analysis were chosen as the primary analytical technique because of the ease with which its guiding principles complemented the study's theoretical framework. Furthermore, it emphasises the essential function of language in the construction of social reality and underscores the perspectives and starting points from which knowledge and meanings are formulated at a given historical moment (Talja, 1999). According to advice from Creswell (2002) and Braun and Clarke (2006), 20 interviews were transcribed. The purpose of the coding process, according to Creswell (2002, p.266; 2012, p.243), is "to make sense of textual data, break it into text or image fragments, label the fragments, verify the code for duplicate and redundancy, and reduce these codes for topics" (Figure 1). As a consequence, the interview data was analysed using Thematic analysis (TA) and Discourse analysis (DA), generating three themes.

Findings and Discussion

The findings suggest that beginners can use social media to gain a sense of self-efficacy and self-determination in spaces that provide appropriate guidance for the exercise of appropriate pedagogical agency, and in doing so, they can succeed in integrating into academia.

Self-efficacy mediated by social media

The interrogation of the data revealed that novices who wanted to improve social learning for a successful integration into academia turned to social media for assistance. The most

popular social media sites mentioned by participants in their reports were WhatsApp, YouTube, Ted Talks, and online writing blogs. New professors have embraced and utilised this type of electronic mentorship extensively to support their social learning. According to the participants, social media is a useful medium for developing unofficial mentorship connections (Briones, Janoske & Paquette, 2013). In a more formal sense, communities of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) should consist of individuals working in a similar field, interacting with both experts and novices, and having "a close relationship of mutual commitment organized around what they are there to do" in addition to "common business" and "common repertoire" (Wenger, 1998). These outcomes are undoubtedly in line with some of these requirements for the formation of a CoP. However, a CoP did not pre- exit, as this discussion has shown, and organizational managers did not advise newcomers to start one. Perhaps it is instructive to reflect on Gourlay's (2011, p.76) observations, in which he asserts that "a community should not be assumed to pre-exist in an academic department in a form that will allow novices with limited experience of advanced scholarship to learn new practices from more experienced colleagues..." However, the data readily demonstrates a CoP, even though in the digital arena, primarily through WhatsApp, a virtual community of practice (vCoP) has emerged through the efforts of newcomers themselves. Lenny underscores the magnitude of using social media to negotiate his social learning by contending: “I have discovered many platforms... I searched the internet…YouTube for ideas…even contacted colleagues to share ideas about writing, teaching…etc…other departments I met in a random meeting and I created a WhatsApp chat group…you know stuff like that…can be a long time sometimes…anytime I...I or a colleague need help with anything…for example me… I hit a dead wall... and was so stressed, when I was writing, I sought help from my colleagues.” These observations enlighten and connect with literature such as (Shpigelman, 2014, p.260), who asserts that "...in these online environments, users can create content, share, and collaborate with other users".

In the same manner, it may be argued a WhatsApp group for like-minded individuals could serve to share ideas and resources on decolonial pedagogy and practices (Garcia, 2020). New lecturers could establish a peer group and develop a forum for critical discussion and decolonialists can agitate for action by using WhatsApp as a collaboration and collective learning tool. Indeed, power relationships associated with traditional mentoring relationships, embedded in colonial power hierarchies may, perhaps, be overcome. Similarly, Lenny’s thoughts echo that of Jane’s own path; positing that she navigated into the academe using social media platforms: “… by far, YouTube was my go-to teacher… my mentor of choice… I learnt so much from YouTube together with TED Talks. People from educational backgrounds share a wealth of information… aaaah for example one of the things that I learnt, and I hold onto very tightly is… ummm… Concept Mapping! So… there's a powerful presentation on Ted Talks about the value of mind mapping and how it can help anyone at almost any learning level. So, as a learner, just starting to teach, I learned about mind mapping in a different way from the textbook approach I took as a student. So… YouTube for me, WhatsApp for me, email and Ted Talks has become the best… great learning platform for me” (T/Ja:3). This would imply that Jane has cultivated a learned preference for online mentorship programs based on asynchronous communication, i.e., communication that is independent of the user's real presence (Shpigelman, 2014).

She also emphasizes the importance of other forms of social media, such as YouTube and online blogs: "… Yes! Into academia, and if I was in a stressful circumstance... I looked for a YouTube uuhmmmm similar experience OR I found blogs that lecturers had written, mostly in an international context, about how to find your way, and I followed these blogs, these teaching blogs, these lecturing blogs from big universities, and even though many of them were from Ivy-league universities, a lot of the ideas were transferable, and I was able to use those ideas, such as how to teach a large class. People's blogs with advice and ideas on how to teach are the finest approach to learn from other people's real-life experiences. Aaahhhh, I know I attempted to introduce the idea of people blogging about their experiences to share with others...because blogging is a whole new way for us to share our own experiences and it starts... start on a small scale because I feel like I want to help the next person who comes along and is in my situation" (T/Ja: 4). Jane's concept of a shared experience is akin to the notion of appropriating social media for faculty development, which may alleviate the difficulties that many participants have in attending face-to-face activities (such as induction or staff development at the university) (Mullen, 2016).

Similar meditations were proposed by other participants. Leonie reflects on WhatsApp's relevance in her social learning by mentioning the manner in which she employs the social media platform to stay in touch with her informal mentors: "Ahhhh maybe once a month, contact the establishment then informally via email, WhatsApp, and that sort of thing..."; whereas Maureen admits: "Sometimes I meet them in their office, in the hallway, or I just call... WhatsApp them, they're really helpful with advice. I must admit that utilizing my phone to contact advisers is a really easy method..."Quick advice...mmmm." Lecturers can join in online communities at opportune times from anywhere and always feel connected (Mullen, 2016). According to the findings of this study, the WhatsApp application can significantly aid in learning activities (Boyinbode et al., 2017). Similarly, Yavuz (2016) suggests that collaborative learning groups be formed to inspire learners and increase overall accomplishment.

Several factors support WhatsApp's success, including its ability to support almost natural conversations, foster a sense of community, affordability, widespread accessibility, and user-friendly for communication (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). The use of WhatsApp seems to support Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory of learning, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction rather than observation. These connections are made possible by smartphones, whose inherent functionality enables learning anywhere, anytime (Lungo & Lee, 2011). Indeed, WhatsApp enables the sharing of files and academic information through chat rooms (Ujakpa et al., 2018). To confirm its effectiveness, Boyinbode et al. (2017) suggested in their study that WhatsApp can significantly improve learning activities.

The majority of participants (18/20, or 90%) reported about the manner in which they espoused social media platforms (SMP) including blogs, WhatsApp, and YouTube to engage with peers or "mentors" in a loosely organized virtual community of practice (VCoP). In this online forum, novices offer and receive help from other novices as well as more experienced peers. Indeed, the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and, more recently, artificial intelligence (AI) tools, provides a wide array of services that are available for free or free of charge to the end user. Interestingly, the use of social media by neophytes appears to be compatible with the ITC vision and

precepts for higher education in the twenty-first century, with its particular emphasis on developing lifelong learning, greater equitable access, enhanced instructional techniques, the diversification of collaborative learning, autonomy, and physical environment troubleshooting (UNESCO, 1998). WhatsApp allows novices and experienced academics to engage with academic content through discussions.

Strategies to cope and the readiness to accept challenges

Self-efficacy, an integral and vital constituent of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) combines self-regulatory learning (Zimmerman, 2002) with the basic concept of self-discovery and in tandem with the use of social media, is blatantly evident from the participants' data. Self-regulation has been formally defined as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions to achieve learning objectives" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Self-efficacy expectations refer to "personal beliefs about a person's ability or capacity to perform a particular behaviour" (Zimmerman & Schunk (2004, p.324). Indeed, self-regulatory learners, in this case neophytes, are aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses, and they have a range of strategies that they apply appropriately that is deemed suitable to meet the daily challenges of learning tasks. In doing so, these newcomers are "self-regulating," describing the process of controlling and evaluating their own learning and behaviour as they exercise self-efficacy.

Many respondents articulated feelings of self-efficacy through a combination of nous, improvising, the internet, in particular, social media- with its multiple platforms- to their own inner strengths of character- of hard work, perseverance and determination to make a success of their lives, with the end goal of a successful assimilating into the academe. Such sentiments are evident the following responses:

Evan's (Q/E:1) attributes his successful transition into the university to a combination of factors. Whilst acknowledging the help from colleagues, he seems to give more credence to his own efforts at efficacity and the more tellingly, the appropriation of social media: "With help from staff members and by my own initiatives I think I have made a successful transition into my new job. Also, I consulted lots of books and the internet, like YouTube and online blogs by novice lecturers at foreign universities and learnt a lot to manage my situation" (Q/E:1).

These thoughts are echoed by Freddy: "With so many systems to learn like Ulink and Mams, I felt overwhelmed. I realised that I had to trust in my own abilities and actively sought help from our staff secretary. In terms of teaching, I took matters in my own hands and made use of various online platforms like YouTube to help me navigate my learning and I even looked at papers that were published to help refine my research writing skills" (Q/F:1). Esther offered similar sentiments: "Also, I took upon myself to use the internet and YouTube to help prepare for the demands of academia" (Q/Es:1).

In the same vein, Leo claims taking responsibility for his own learning with the help of social media: "One of the main challenges that I have encountered as a new academic is striking a balance between performing optimally as a teacher and researcher. Due to the fact that I love teaching, I find that it is often easier for me to gravitate towards wanting to teach instead of research. I found myself discovering things on my own; simply had to- it was the case of taking responsibility for my own learning- which I have done all my life. I spent hours preparing using the internet and social media, like YouTube and in so doing I became more confident in meeting the challenges that academia threw at me. So hard work,

being inventive and relying on your own strengths helped me a lot.", (Q/Le:1). Patrick also attributes his learning through a combination of self-efficacy, with the help of mentoring from colleagues in an informal arrangement, to the use of social media: learning the new processes and procedures was very daunting, however, I found my way by applying myself to the demands of the job. But I am still daunted by the amount of research that is required of academics – intimidating… but I am getting there with help from my friends that I have befriended within our department. So, a combination of informal mentoring and my own strong work ethic helped me through. I cannot speak more highly of my mentors, who have helped me whenever I needed help or assistance. We created a support group using WhatsApp and it's just such a help in helping me navigate the rough seas of academia. Time is a precious commodity and WhatsApp offers a respite from busy and sometimes chaotic lives of academics; work overload can be very demanding, especially with all the assessments and marking that is required. Advice is only a text or call away." (Q/P:1).

Still, further, Chantal reports on her own self- efficacy initiatives with informal support structures offered by a WhatsApp chat group as the driving forces behind her integration into the university: "Being a young lecturer, the major challenge was experience, how do I relate content to the business environment, how do I bring in applicable examples that students can relate to. I soon realized it was all linked to knowledge, I need to be prepared not only for the theoretical aspect, but for the actual business environment as well. I had to do a lot of more research, reading, understanding and linking. I decided to actively keep on learning, so whenever there is a workshop, course, summit, conference- I would do my best to attend and this has been my best decision, I have gained so much more experience, knowledge and started to create my own network by hooking up with both senior and novice lecturers via a WhatsApp group chat." (Q/Ch:1).

Jon(Q/Jo:1) also meditates similar musings by adding crucially that in the absence of any form of mentoring and left to his devices due to the isolating experience of being an academic, propelled him into taking responsibility for his own learning aided by Social media: "Being a young lecturer, the major challenge was getting over my introverted nature, but I suppose academic life, as I experienced thus far, is a lonely, isolating experience. So, this ironically suited my personality type perfectively. Left to my own devices, in the absence of any form of mentoring, I took responsibility for my own learning. I made use of the internet, scoured Blogs on best practices, listen to TED Talks and learnt a lot from YouTube. I soon realized that social media is of great help and since then, I have not looked back. Also, I had to do a lot of more research, taking the initiative to make my lessons relevant and interesting for my students. I also attended workshops whenever I could because sometimes, they are scheduled during lesson time, making it difficult to attend." (Q/Jo:1).

These thoughts are also affirmed by Mark: "I think the main difficulty is getting used to a new system and ways of doing things. New academics are also not entirely familiar with the research process and supervision and what it entails. I have navigated my way by attending workshops, speaking with a mentor about research and co-supervising. I also had to draw on various resources like the internet, like YouTube to help in my development as an academic. Online blogs of research writing also helped in filling in the gaps especially on how to present a paper." (Q/Mar:1).

The results presented provide new insights into how new faculty are socialised into academia. Lost, out of place, and alone, these neophytes have integrated into academia by

seeking help from their more experienced colleagues in an informal mentoring program organised by their own devices or by taking charge of their own learning through self-directed initiatives (Zimmerman, 2002) and nous; and finally, by taking advantage of various social media platforms, notably YouTube and WhatsApp messaging services. As this research shows, WhatsApp groups can be formed around specific topics or principles, and members can share resources, ask questions, interrogate praxis, and participate in conversations related to their area of interest (Chigona, Chigona & Kausa, 2018). The widespread use of the Internet, and more specifically, advancements in technology with the inception of the Age of Technology (the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)), have culminated in a substantial shift in the way individuals interact with developing technologies, including mentoring practices (Single & Single, 2005).

Indeed, these newcomers were able to adapt and change, not only via the application of skills acquired in previous employment at other institutions or as temporary staff at the university but also through a combination of intuition and the assistance of various social media platforms. The data analysis indicates the fundamental role of social media in the social learning of neophytes, which is substantial and maybe all-defining. Electronic or digital mentoring, informally referred to as e- mentoring (VCops), has gained in popularity in recent times and unveils novel opportunities for investigating the complexities of modern faculty socialisation in academia (Mullen, 2016). With the current COVID-19 outbreak and its impositions and ramifications of personal distancing, vCoP delivers a viable alternative to traditional mentoring methods, echoing the thoughts of researchers who argue that mentoring during the coronavirus pandemic has been dramatically altered (Nocco et al., 2021).

Limitations of the study

While electronic mentoring and social media have the potential to be "game changers" in higher education, this is a small-scale study. Further research could investigate how social media platforms could be used by novices in changing the colonial narratives still predominant in higher education institutes (HEI's).

Conclusion

This study found that neophytes become academics primarily through informal learning experiences mediated mostly through social media platforms (SMPs)—along with a good dose of intuition and a variety of coping methods. Informal communities of practice (VCops) appear to operate on an almost invisible level, in that they are not formal arrangements, but rather a collection of new faculty and experienced colleagues working together to achieve mutual and individual goals in a mutually beneficial "arrangement." These experiences may have aided their integration into academia by permitting them to participate in a community of practice, albeit a virtual community that Lave and Wenger (1991) would define as "legitimate periphery participation" (ibid). The findings shed light on how neophytes are socialised in academia. Institutions and/or universities would benefit from encouraging such socialising strategies. Indeed, with a clear framework and institutional support, virtual communities of practice (VCoP) can give multiple opportunities for faculty advancement (Sherer, Shea & Kristensen, 2003). Arguably, neophytes' use of technology has created new groundwork in the prevailing and existing discourse about new academics' mentoring activities. Indeed, social learning through

WhatsApp, due to its adaptability and versatility is a valuable weapon in the armoury of neophytes in their efforts to assimilate into the academe by providing an alternative form of mentoring and as a repository of support services. Experienced faculty members can appropriate WhatsApp to mentor and give advice to novice colleagues, especially in the areas of pedagogy and curriculum development (Smit, 2020). This can be particularly helpful for those who are just starting out on their travails through academia and may not have access to formal mentoring programs or support structures. These digital platforms and/or spaces offer new perspectives on mentorship practices as we know them.

The widespread adoption of the Internet, the Fourth Industrial Revolution or 4IR, and a plethora of social media platforms, have all resulted in a significant shift in the way we interact with emerging technologies, including mentoring (Single & Single, 2005). Indeed, the WhatsApp application has emerged as a viable option for learning and teaching (Cansoy, 2017). Additionally, previous studies suggest that informal approaches are extensively used by faculty (Jennings & Wargnier, 2011). Pause and we miss a plethora of opportunities to embrace the future of mentoring. According to the study, when novices actively seek out peers and discover novel techniques to interact with academia, they take ownership for their own social learning and immerse themselves in the delight of self-discovery. Adding impetus to adoption of electronic mentoring, the distinction between educator preparation and ongoing educator professional growth has also become blurred in the current COVID-19 context (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). Surely electronic mentoring with its multi fold advantages could offer pathways to new and exciting opportunities for mentoring in the digital age and more so, in advancing decolonisation and advancing social learning in Africa.

The study recommends an extensive institutional discussion of the conceptual issues behind e-mentoring as well as its benefits for both institutions and novices alike. Instead, it is of the utmost importance that "...novices and department heads ought to utilise these networks in order to thrive in the face of a rapidly changing world that affects the workplace" (Darwin & Palmer, 2009, p.126). Furthermore, institutions should recognize, value, and promote the establishment of robust online communities of practice (McLoughlin et al., 2018). Indeed, social media mentoring, particularly via WhatsApp, has the capacity to advance decolonisation and build an inclusive and equitable learning environment in higher education in Africa (Brennan & Duraisingh, 2018). This collaborative approach empowers students to challenge the status quo and effect positive change in their communities. Moreover, social learning has significant implications for higher education in Africa as it can help bridge the digital divide and enhance access to education. Embracing social media mentoring and social learning can transform the way knowledge is produced and disseminated in African higher education institutions, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. It has been tacitly opined that universities are fertile grounds for effecting the emancipatory decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). Mentoring via Social media platforms are well positioned to achieve this end goal.

It should be noted that the first artificial intelligence teaching assistant, "Jill Watson", with an accuracy rate of 97%, has been successfully applied at a South African university to assist students to better understand engineering concepts (Pillay, Maharaj & Van Eeden, 2018). As a touchstone of the impact of the 4th industrial revolution has already had on

higher education, with such leaps in technology, the advent of an artificial intelligence (AI) mentor is surely upon us.

References

1. Amry, A.B. (2014). The impact of WhatsApp mobile social learning on the achievement and attitudes of female students compared with face to face learning in the classroom. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 10(22), 116-136.
2. Ardichvili, A., Page, V. & Wentling, T. (2003). Motivation and barriers to participation in virtual knowledge-sharing communities of practice. Journal of knowledge management, 7(1), 64-77. https://doi.org/10.1108/13673270310463626
3. Bouhnik, D. & Deshen, M. (2014). WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students. Journal of Information Technology Education. Research, 13, 217-231. http://www.jite.org/documents/Vol13/JITEv13ResearchP217-231Bouhnik0601.pdf
4. Boyinbode, O. K., Agbonifo, O. C. & Ogundare, A. (2017). Supporting mobile learning with Whatsapp based on media richness. Circulation in Computer Science, 2(3), 37–46. https://doi.org/10.22632/ccs-2017-251-89
5. Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101.
6. Brennan, R. & Duraisingh, E. D. (2018). WhatsAppening? Advancing social media mentoring in African higher education. Journal of African Media Studies, 10(1), 99-117.
7. Briones, R., Janoske, M. & Paquette, M. (2013). New media, new mentoring: An exploration of social media's role in public relations mentorships. Prism, 9(1), 1-14.
8. Cansoy, R. (2017). Teachers' Professional Development: The case of WhatsApp. Journal of Education and Learning, 6(4), 285-293.
9. Chigona, W., Chigona, A. & Kausa, J. (2018). Exploring the use of WhatsApp for teaching and learning in higher education. International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology, 14(3), 18-35.
10. Church, K. & De Oliveira, R. (2013). What's up with WhatsApp? Comparing mobile instant messaging behaviours with traditional SMS. In Proceedings of the 15th international conference on Human-computer interaction with mobile devices and services, pp. 352-361. https://doi.org/10.1145/2493190.2493225
11. Cinkara, E. & Arslan, F. Y. (2017). Content analysis of a Facebook group as a form of mentoring for EFL teachers. English Language Teaching, 10(3), 40-53.
12. Creswell, J. W. (2002). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Pearson Higher Ed.
13. Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Pearson Education.
14. Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage publications.
15. Darwin, A. & Palmer, E. (2009). Mentoring circles in higher education. Higher education research & development, 28(2), 125-136. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360902725017
16. Darling-Hammond, L. & Hyler, M. E. (2020). Preparing educators for the time of COVID… and beyond. European Journal of Teacher Education, 43(4), 457-465. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1816961
17. De Wet, C. & Hartell, C. (2020). Social media and academic activism in South Africa: A case study of #RhodesMustFall. Journal of African Cultural Studies, 32(2), 209-223.
18. Garcia, M. (2020). Decolonial pedagogy: Using digital media to promote critical consciousness and social justice. Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 11(2), 37-56.
19. Gourlay, L. (2011). New lecturers and the myth of 'communities of practice'. Studies in continuing education, 33(1), 67-77. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2010.515570
20. Gülbahar, Y. (2014). Current state of usage of social media for education: Case of Turkey. Journal of Social Media Studies, 1(1), 53-69. https://doi.org/10.15340/2147336611763

21. Hamilton, B. A. & Scandura, T. A. (2002). E-mentoring: Implications for organizational learning and development in a wired world. Organizational Dynamics, 31(4), 388-402.
22. Hedding, D W., Greve, M., Breetzke, G. D., Nel, W. & Van Vuuren. B.J. (2020). COVID-19 and the academe in South Africa: Not business as usual. South African Journal of Science, 116(7-8), 1-3. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2020/8298
23. Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B. (2004). Finding your way in qualitative research. Van Schaik.
24. Hodkinson, H. & Hodkinson, P. (2004). Rethinking the concept of community of practice in relation to schoolteachers' workplace learning. International journal of training and development, 8(1), 21-31. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-3736.2004.00193.x
25. Jennings, C. & Wargnier, J. (2011). Effective learning with 70: 20: 10. The new frontier for the extended enterprise. Acedido em abril 5. Available: https://alberonpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Alberon_Wargnier_2011-70-20-10_vEN.pdf
26. Jokisalo, E. & Riu, A. (2009). Informal learning in the era of web 2.0. eLearning Papers, 14(5), 1-6.
27. Knight, P., Tait, J. & Yorke, M. (2006). The professional learning of teachers in higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 31(3), 319–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070600680786
28. Kobie, N. (2019). WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app in Africa. Wired. Retrieved from https://www.wired.co.uk/article/whatsapp-africa-most-popular-messaging-app
29. Kram, K. E. (1985). Improving the mentoring process. Training & Development Journal. 39(4), 40–43.
30. Krishnannair, A., Krishnannair. S. & Krishnannair, S. (2021). Learning environments in higher education: Their adaptability to the 4th industrial revolution and the'social transformation' discourse. South African Journal of Higher Education, 35(3), 65-82. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-high-v35-n3-a5
31. Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge university press.
32. Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (2002). Practice, person, social world. In An Introduction to Vygotsky (pp. 155-162). Routledge.
33. Maldonado-Torres, N. (2011). Thinking through the decolonial turn: Post-continental interventions in theory, philosophy, and critique—An introduction. TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of peripheral cultural production of the Luso-Hispanic world, 1(2), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.5070/T412011805
34. Malecela, I. O. (2016). Usage of WhatsApp among postgraduate students of kulliyyah of education, International Islamic University Malaysia. International Journal of Advanced Engineering Research and Science, 3(10), 126-137. https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijaers/3.10.21
35. McLoughlin, C., Patel K.D., O'Callaghan, T. & Reeves, S. (2018). The use of virtual communities of practice to improve interprofessional collaboration and education: findings from an integrated review. Journal of interprofessional care, 32(2), 136-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2017.1377692
36. McNally, J., Blake, A. & Reid, A. (2009). The informal learning of new teachers in schooL. Journal of Workplace Learning, 21(4), 322-333. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13665620910954210
37. Merriam, S.B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from case study research in education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
38. Mullen, C. A. (2016). Alternative mentoring types. Kappa Delta Pi Record, 52(3), 132-136. https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2016.1191901
39. Murphy, W. M. (2012). Reverse mentoring at work: Fostering cross generational learning and developing millennial leaders. Human Resource Management, 51(4), 549–573. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21489
40. Mwesige, G. & Ssenyonga, J. (2018). #FeesMustFall and decolonisation in South Africa: A social media analysis. African Journalism Studies, 39(3), 35-54.
41. Nkomo, S. M. (2017). Rhodes must fall and social media: A South African case study. Media, Culture & Society, 39(6), 868-884.
42. Nocco, M. A., McGill, B. M., MacKenzie, C.M., Tonietto, R. K., Dudney, J., Bletz, M. L. & Kuebbing, S. E. (2021). Mentorship, equity, and research productivity: Lessons from a pandemic. Biological conservation 255, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2021.108966

43. Olabisi, N. S. & Tella, A. (2020). Social media and social learning in higher education: A review of the literature. Education and Information Technologies, 25(5), 3835-3852.
44. Owen, G. T. (2014). Qualitative methods in higher education policy analysis: Using interviews and document analysis. The qualitative report, 19(26), 1-19.
45. Pillay, N., Maharaj, B.T. & van Eeden, G. (2018). AI in engineering and computer science education in preparation for the 4th industrial revolution: a South African perspective. In 2018 World Engineering Education Forum-Global Engineering Deans Council (WEEF-GEDC) (pp. 1-5). IEEE.
46. Sayan, H. (2016). Affecting higher students learning activity by using WhatsApp. European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences, 4(3), 88-93.
47. Sherer, P. D., Shea, T. P. & Kristensen, E. (2003). Online communities of practice: A catalyst for faculty development. Innovative Higher Education, 27(3), 183-194. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022355226924
48. Shpigelman, C. (2014). Electronic mentoring and media. The handbook of youth mentoring 259-272.
49. Single, P. B. & Single, M. R. (2005). E-mentoring for social equity: review of research to inform program development. Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 13(2), 301-320. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260500107481
50. Smit, B. (2020). Using WhatsApp to facilitate communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing in a professional development programme for higher education lecturers. The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions, 40(2), 115-118.
51. Smith, S. J. & Israel, M. (2010). E-mentoring: Enhancing special education teacher induction. Special Education Leadership, 23(1), 30-40.
52. Sorcinelli, M. D. & Yun, J. (2007). From mentor to mentoring networks: mentoring in the new academy. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 39(6), 58-61. https://doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.39.6.58-C4
53. Stewart, T. (2010). Online communities. Behaviour and Information Technology, 29(6), 555–556. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2010.523615
54. Susilo, A. (2014). Using Facebook and WhatsApp to leverage learner participation and transform pedagogy at the Open University of Indonesia. Jurnal Pendidikan Terbuka Dan Jarak Jauh, 15(2), 63-80.
55. Talja, S. (1999). Analyzing qualitative interview data: The discourse analytic method. Library & information science research, 21(4), 459-477. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188(99)00024-9
56. Ujakpa, M. M., Heukelman, D., Lazarus, V. K., Neiss, P. & Rukanda, G. D. (2018). Using WhatsApp to support communication in teaching and learning. In 2018 IST-Africa Week Conference (IST-Africa), pp. Page-1. IEEE.
57. Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. Readings on the development of children, 23(3), 34-41.
58. Warhurst, R. P. (2008). 'Cigars on the flight-deck': New lecturers' participatory learning within workplace communities of practice. Studies in higher education, 33(4), 453-467. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802211828
59. Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. Systems thinker, 9(5), 2-3.
60. Yang, L., O'Reilly, K. & Houghton, J. (2020). Silver-lining of COVID-19: A virtual community of practice for faculty development. All Ireland Journal of Higher Education, 12(3), 1-9.
61. Yavuz, F. (2016). Do smartphones spur or deter learning: A WhatsApp case study. International Journal of Educational Sciences, 15(3), 408-415. https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2016.11890551
62. Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory into practice, 41(2), 64-70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2
63. Zimmerman, B. J. & Schunk, D. H. (2004). Self-regulating intellectual processes and outcomes: A social cognitive perspective. In Motivation, emotion, and cognition: Integrative perspectives on intellectual functioning and development, 323-349.