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Flexibility and agility in pedagogical contingency planning design in open, distance and e-learning

Abstract

Pedagogical contingency policy planning in open distance and e-learning plays a critical role in achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim to stem poverty, protect the planet, foster gender equality, defend and promote cultures and cultural understanding, and ensure prosperity for all. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to describe criticalities of flexibility and agility in pedagogical contingency policy planning designs in open, distance and e-learning in developing states like South Africa. Furthermore, it examines epistemologies of diverse students' pedagogic inclusion in line with social justice and equal rights during strategic planning and management. The legal rational paradigm is underpinned by a qualitative narrative research design to analyse available theories and epistemologies of flexibility and agility in pedagogical contingency policy planning theories in open distance and e-learning. Using the theory of justice by Rawls, the paper recommends that flexibility and agility in pedagogical contingency policy planning in open, distance and e-learning ecosystems must ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are catered for in line with social justice and equal rights values and principles. This is critical for a country like South Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: *high flexibility and agility; pedagogical contingency planning (PCP); Covid-19; policy paradigms; teaching and learning; open distance and e-learning (ODEL)*

1. Introduction

Globally, around 131 million schoolchildren in 11 countries have missed three quarters of their in-person learning from March 2020 to September 2021 (UNESCO, 2021). Among them, 59% – or nearly 77 million – have missed almost all in-person instruction time. These 77 million students come from six countries. Among these countries, Bangladesh and the Philippines represent 62 million of the 77 million learners impacted. Around 27% of countries worldwide continue to have schools fully or partially closed. Additionally, according

to UNESCO's latest data, more than 870 million students at all levels are currently facing disruptions to their education (UNESCO, 2021).

To respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching and learning in open distance and e-learning (ODeL) and other institutions of higher learning modified students' approaches to teaching and learning. ODeL planners, lecturers or facilitators generally acknowledge that 'equal rights' and 'social justice' are commonly used to depict the requirement for society to treat people fairly comprehensively. During pedagogical contingency planning (PCP) design for change, institutional leadership needs to accommodate students' circumstances equitably, in other words fairness, social justice and equal rights values and principles must be adhered to. Social justice implies redefining what it means to have access to quality instruction and learning. Equal rights and social justice in education require careful inclusion of a diverse group of hybrid members of any given society, thus diversity and equity are guiding beacons. Equal rights and social justice take into cognisance diverse personal experiences, values and philosophical views that emanate from race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, religious and spiritual beliefs, class, age, colour, sexual orientation, disability, living in the diaspora and nationality to enhance creativity and learning potential.

2. Purpose statement

The conceptual paper discusses criticalities of flexibility and agility in pedagogical contingency policy planning (PCP) designs as applied by open, distance and e-learning (ODeL) institutions in developing states like South Africa. I furthermore examined epistemologies of diverse students' pedagogic inclusion in line with social justice and equal rights principles, pre-, during and post-strategic planning models and frameworks.

3. Flexibility and agility in ODeL policy contingency planning theories

The single most significant agile step that institutions that offer ODeL mode of education delivery can take to continue facilitating teaching and learning is to increase access to those in need of education by adapting to different technological platforms. Once they have done so, to deal with the complex challenges of contact facilitation, they should follow a thorough consultative preparatory process and adopt a flexible and agile PCP for online and virtual teaching and learning. An undeniable human right, education is the bedrock of just, equal and inclusive societies and a key driver of sustainable development. Therefore, institutional PCP policy regimes accommodate a diverse range of students' educational needs and accessibility. Strengthening the resilience of ODeL systems enables institutions to respond to the immediate challenges of safely reopening centres of learning and positions them to cope better with future crises.

The PCP theory is not only for disasters but involves planning and preparing for specific events such as the loss of teaching and learning time, modification of instructional modes and platforms, adapting instructional tools in open, distance and e-learning (ODeL) and other relevant factors undermining education reform in general. Because of this, any existing institution of teaching and learning must have a contingency plan in place to ensure smooth workflow and it becomes easier to address issues and threats that way. Flexibility and agility theories in PCP are the results of preparedness actions. It refers to the outcome of planning, resource allocation, training, exercise and organisation to build, maintain and improve operational capabilities based on risk assessments.

In this concept paper, agility is the natural evolution of flexibility. Up until the 1990s, the term 'flexibility' was used for agility, but due to PCP design changes, competitiveness and the need for speed, the term 'agility' was coined. While flexibility is viewed as an operational capability, agility is a strategic capability that enables an organisation to develop a strategic long-term vision. In fact, flexibility is an agility skill alongside other skills like responsiveness or speed (Abdelilah, El Korchi, & Balambo, 2018).

4. Theoretical perspective

Van der Westhuizen (1991: 80) views contingency as an approach that requires a different management style and therefore no general way of managing is applicable to all situations. Hoy and Miskel (1982: 235) have the following to say: "... the contingency theories maintain that leadership effectiveness rests on the fit between personality properties of the leader and the situational variables such as task structure, position power, and subordinate skills and altitudes". Marks, Stoops and King-Stoops (in Van der Westhuizen, 1991: 137) define planning as "the management task which is concerned with deliberately reflecting on the objectives of the organisation, the resources, as well as the activities involved, and drawing up the most suitable plan for effectively achieving these objectives". However, very little, if any, is said about flexibility and agility in pedagogical contingency planning (PCP) designs. PCP design should never be reserved for calamities only but should be part of day-to-day leadership and management activities.

The current concept paper uses the theory of justice by Rawls (1971) that provides a contract theory of the principles of social justice in terms of the "basic structure of society, or [in other words] the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties [to] determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (Rawls, 1971: 6). The distributive justice proposed by Rawls is underpinned by two fundamental principles. The first principle, which is prioritised over the second, is the idea that people's liberties should be preserved in distribution. The second principle is the idea that any inequality that is permitted should only be permitted on the basis that it benefits the least favoured in society.

Many ODeL institutions around the world are now reopening fully, partially or in a hybrid format, leaving millions of students, particularly in developing states, to face a radically transformed educational experience in the form of open distance and e-learning. One will argue that as Covid-19 pandemic cases rise and fall during the months ahead, the chaos will likely continue, with ODeL institutions shutting down and reopening as needed to balance educational needs while protecting the health of students, lecturers, support staff and families. Invariably, agility in university leadership practices must ascertain that ODeL policy accommodates pro-poor students virtually, or education will remain the preserve of the elite. Rawls' (1971) theory of justice and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirm that education is a fundamental human right for everyone and this was further detailed in the Convention against Discrimination in Education (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011). After having completed a thorough situation analysis and getting an understanding about what is currently being done under Covid-19 pandemic lockdown to identify the gaps, ODeL institutional policy planners must review their business model to accommodate the educational rights of a diversity of students.

Educational philosophers have also drawn on several classical philosophical discussions of justice and applied them to contemporary educational situations. For example, they have

considered how Kant's (1883) categorical imperative, Mill's (2000) utilitarianism, or Rawls' (1971) original position may help planners to provide criteria for making assessments or judgments about whether educational policies and practices are fair. In this vein, Rizvi (1998: 48) identifies three broad philosophical traditions for thinking about social justice: liberal individualism, market individualism and social democracy. The liberal individualist view, drawn heavily from Rawls (1971), elevates fairness as the central feature of justice. Two principles of Rawls (1971) come into play in the liberal individualist perspective. Firstly, each person is entitled to as much freedom as possible if others share the same freedom. Secondly, social goods should be distributed as equally as possible, with inequities being allocated in a way that benefits the least privileged members of society. Almost diametrically opposed to Rawls, the market individualist view of justice emphasises that people are entitled in relationship to their efforts. Rizvi cites Nozick's (1976) work to support this perspective on social justice, which advocates that justice is measured by fair starting conditions. Rizvi (1998: 49) writes that in this perspective, it is "the justice of the competition – that is, the way competition was carried out and not its outcome – that counts". The social democratic perspective, largely drawn from Marx, considers justice in relationship to the needs of various individuals, emphasizing a more collectivist or cooperative vision of society (Miller, 1999; Nozick, 1973).

5. Related literature review

5.1 Educational contingency planning

Pedagogical Contingency Planning (PCP) design is contextually defined in this paper as a planning technique (including prototyping and modelling) that determines actions to be taken by individual planners and groups at specific places and times if abnormal threats or opportunities arise. McFarland (1977) defines contingency planning (CP) as, "a concept of executive action that embodies the skills of anticipating, influencing and controlling the nature and direction of changes".

Features of a plan (McFarland, 1977) are the following:

1. Planning is a process rather than behaviour at a given point in time. The process determines the future course of action.
2. Planning is primarily concerned with looking into the future, which requires forecasting of the future situation.
3. Planning involves the selection of a suitable course of action.
4. Planning is undertaken at all levels of management and is concerned with the future course of action.
5. Planning is flexible and agile as commitment is based on future conditions which are always dynamic.
6. Planning is a continuous managerial function involving the process of perception, analysis, conceptual thought, sequencing, communication, decision and action.

Therefore, pedagogical contingency planning (PCP) design refers to an organisational planning process of developing the thinking behind an entire ODeL landscape in virtual and online teaching and learning activities. PCP design is concerned with pedagogical practices that influence learning of all students, are part of the lecturer's pedagogical thinking when they are planning their teaching and learning (Nyoni, 2013). A good plan should aim at the

improvement of physical facilities, lecturer skills and competence library services, curricular, co-curricular activities, participation in community programmes and the like.

5.2 The Covid-19 pandemic as a crisis impacting on ODeL teaching and learning

Even if a second wave of Covid-19 pandemic infections is avoided, global economic activity was expected to fall by 6% in 2020, with average unemployment in OECD countries climbing to 9.2%, from 5.4% in 2019. In the event of a second large-scale outbreak triggering a return to lockdown, the situation would be worse (OECD, 2020). All this has implications for equitable accessibility of education, which depends on tax money, but which is also the key to tomorrow's tax income. Decisions concerning budget allocations to various sectors (including education, healthcare, social security and defence) depend on countries' priorities and the prevalence of private provision of these services.

Education is not only a fundamental human right, but also an enabling right with a direct impact on the realisation of all other human rights. It is a global common good and a primary driver of progress across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a bedrock of just, equal, inclusive and peaceful societies. When education systems collapse, peace, prosperous and productive societies cannot be sustained. The massive efforts made in a short time to respond to the shocks to education systems remind us that change is possible (UN, 2020). ODeL contingency planners should seize the opportunity to find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of solutions previously considered difficult or impossible to implement.

5.3 The impact of Covid-19 as a crisis in education contingency planning

The current Covid-19 crisis may affect education budgets more quickly as public revenues decline sharply and governments review the prioritisation of education in national budgets (Hallak, 1969; UN, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; 2021). Forecasts predict that the pandemic will lead to slower growth in government spending in the coming years and that, if the share of government spending devoted to education were to remain unchanged, education spending would continue to grow, but at significantly lower rates than before the pandemic (Al-Samarrai, Gangwar & Gala, 2020).

The Covid-19 crisis has brought to the fore the need to focus on PCP designs for learning equity and inclusion. The most challenging issue in education under the current crisis is to ensure that equity in access and learning are not set back. Given the nature of the crisis, all countries need to lend support to the most vulnerable children to keep them from being further marginalised and ensure they remain engaged in learning. Equity and inclusion in learning needs to continue being a key objective in crisis management. In any ODeL institution, educational PCP design is necessitated by varied reasons which include, among others, the desire for the organisation to meet the yearnings, needs and aspirations of the students and national interests, the demand for education and equitable access to education, to provide quality education to the students, to respond to innovative technological development, to ensure global competitiveness and, more importantly, to actualise education philosophy.

5.4 An exacerbation of disparities in learning opportunities

An estimated 40% of the poorest countries failed to support learners at risk during the Covid-19 crisis and past experiences show that both education and student inequalities tend

to be neglected in responses to quality and equitable education provisioning. The digital divide has especially far-reaching consequences when it comes to education. For students in low-income rural districts, inadequate access to technology can hinder them from learning the technological skills that are crucial to success in today's economy (UN, 2020).

Technology now allows lecturers to differentiate instruction, providing extra support and developmentally appropriate material to students who require constant constructive feedback and feedforward. The latest 'intelligent' facilitating systems can not only assess a student's current weaknesses, but also diagnose why students are making specific errors. These technologies could enable lecturers to reach students who are further from their lecture halls better, potentially benefiting students with weaker academic preparation. If PCP design does not cater for poorly resourced students, the process of teaching and learning violates their rights. PCP must accommodate the disparities that exist among the resourced and those that are without rights as enshrined in a Bill of Rights.

5.5 A wide range of distance learning tools

Ensuring learning continuity during the time of ODeL closures became a priority for them the world over, many of which turned to ICT, requiring lecturers to move to virtual classrooms and other blended delivery modes. Racheva (2018) defines the virtual classroom as an online learning environment that enables live teaching and interaction between lecturers and students. The most common tools in virtual lectures include videoconferencing, online whiteboards, instant messaging tools and breakout rooms. Countries report that some modalities have been used more than others, depending on the education level, with variability across regions. In areas with limited connectivity, governments have used more traditional distance learning modalities, often a mix of educational television and radio programming, and the distribution of print materials. Relatively few countries are monitoring the effective reach and use of distance learning modalities. Estimates indicate variable coverage: distance learning in high income countries covers about 80–85%, while this drops to less than 50 per cent in low-income countries (UN, 2020). This shortfall can largely be attributed to the digital divide, with the disadvantaged having limited access to basic household services such as electricity, a lack of technology infrastructure, and low levels of digital literacy among students, parents, and lecturers (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Bates, 2012; Nyoni, 2014).

5.6 Digital transformation and reform in ODeL

The emergence of internet-based distance learning is attributed to the information revolution. In addition to print materials, course materials are now available in digital format. Today, students can even conduct virtual experiments and simulations with educational software applications. ODeL pedagogies are mapped into three specific generations; firstly, the cognitive-behaviourist pedagogy that focuses on the way in which learning was predominately prescribed, practised and researched among learners in the latter half of the 20th century. Secondly, the Social-Constructivist pedagogy of distance education (DE) focuses on a tradition of cognitive constructivist thinking that hinges on personal construction of knowledge. The roots of the constructivist model most commonly applied today emanate from the works of Vygotsky and Dewey and are generally lumped together in the broad category of social constructivism. Lastly, the Connectivist Pedagogy of DE emerged recently and is known as connectivism. Connectivism views learning as the process of building networks of information contacts and resources that are applied to real problems. Since the three generations arose in different eras and in chronological order, none of the three pedagogical generations has

disappeared and one will argue that they can still be used effectively to address the full spectrum of learning needs.

Aside from these differences, the third-generation distance learning is unlike the first two in a fundamental way. The main objective of the first and second generations was to produce and distribute teaching and learning materials to learners. The learning activities were predominantly one-way, and interactivity was supported marginally. Internet-based learning, however, enables interaction between instructors and students (Bates, 2012; Nyoni, 2014). Internet-based distance learning can be categorised into two models: recorded online courses (asynchronous) and online interactive sessions (synchronous) (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Nyoni, 2014).

The Covid-19 crisis has shed light on the key enabling factors for effective digital education: connectivity and suitable digital equipment for students and lecturers. Online and virtual teaching and learning require confident and skilled lecturers in using digital technology to support their teaching and adapted pedagogy, leadership, collaboration and the sharing of good practice and innovative teaching methods. Experiences from this period show that education and training systems and institutions that previously invested in their digital capacity are better prepared to adapt teaching approaches, keep learners engaged, and continue the education and training process (Anderson & Dron, 2011; UN, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; 2021). Internet connectivity is now a public utility that can be used to improve learning capacity. To comply with human rights tenets, it is critical that ODeL policy planners equitably provide accessibility and connectivity to the poorest students. The internet and broadband connectivity plays a critical role in solving many of the world's most pressing challenges. The internet offers important avenues for countries to transform themselves into hubs of knowledge, innovation and progress; broadband technologies are a means to access the internet, and they are also widely recognised to make a significant contribution to productivity and employability. Hence, it is critical for education institutional policy planners to make certain that those poor students have access (UN, 2020).

5.7 ODeL exercise of educational contingency planning ecosystem

PCP is fundamental to the achievement of set goals in any organisation. PCP design is a deliberate effort to determine the future course of action for accomplishing predetermined goals and objectives. Akpan (2000) conceptualises PCP design as the process of examining the future and drawing up or mapping out a course of action for achieving specified goals and objectives. It involves working out, in broad outline, the informal and procedures for doing them to accomplish set purpose.

Similarly, UNESCO (2003) describes PCP design as a process that makes it possible to work out a systematic outline of activities to be undertaken to meet the developmental objectives of a country within that country's possibilities and aspirations. These definitions depict that PCP design is both futuristic and goal oriented. It is intelligent preparation for actions that will lead to the achievement of predetermined goals and objectives (Akpan, 2000). It involves a conscious, careful and systematic process of arranging a future course of action directed at goal accomplishment.

Comb (cited in Akpan, 2011) describes educational PCP design as the application of rational systematic analysis to the process of educational development with the aim of making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of the learners

and the society. This means that educational PCP design should consider the needs of the pupils/students in terms of learning facilities and equipment, textbooks, classroom spaces and qualified educational personnel.

Educational PCP strives to research, develop, implement and advance policies, programmes and reforms within ODeL institutions. Educational planners might work at the local, national or international level to advance or improve education.

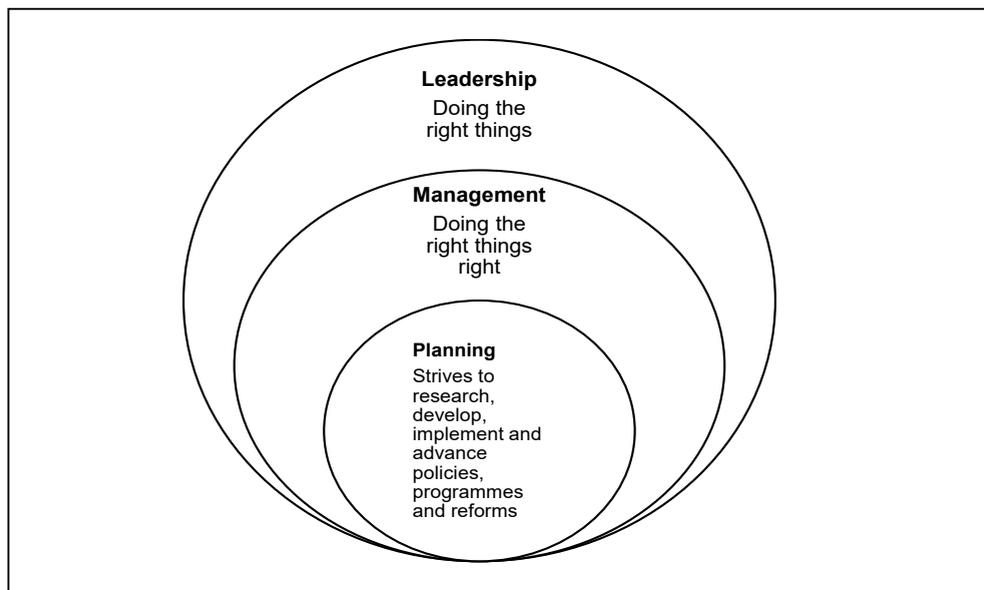


Figure 1: *Overlapping relationships of leadership, management, and the PCP design ecosystem.*

The three basic skills depict the following: (a) Leadership is the ability to inspire a team to achieve a certain goal. (b) Management is a problem-solving process of effectively achieving organizational objectives through the efficient use of scarce resources in a changing environment. (c) PCP design strives to research, develop, implement and advance policies, programmes and reforms within educational institutions (adapted from Drucker, 2003)

5.8 Diversity and equity contingency planning in context

The scope of diversity, equity and inclusion work includes a wide range of social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation), focal groups (e.g., students, faculty and staff) and core areas applicable across focal groups and social identities (e.g., recruitment and retention, campus climate, curriculum and instruction) (Worthington, 2012). For the purposes of this chapter, *diversity* can be defined as students from various backgrounds. As a nation and a country, the world is becoming more diverse and multi-ethnic. *Inclusion* is the act of bringing diverse students, lecturers and ancillary staff together in a manner that celebrates and values their backgrounds. *Equity* is the process of ensuring that each student has the access and opportunity needed to realise their full educational potential.

Morales, Knowles and Bourg (2014) distinguish diversity from social justice in the literature by stating that diversity encompasses fundamental efforts to improve services, handling of intercultural differences and staffing challenges, while social justice addresses power and privilege at both structural levels the level of mere representation.

5.9 Contingency planning for digital transformation

A digital transformation plan is a strategic, long-term plan focusing on integrated digital media channels, the implementation of new technologies, and smart, digital ways of working. The purpose of a digital transformation plan is to define how to compete more effectively with digital marketing. The scope of a digital marketing plan is typically annual, but a digital transformation plan will typically be longer since this involves creating long-term digital roadmaps. Since creating awareness and achieving conversion still commonly involve offline channels such as a call-centre, digital marketing plans need to define the integration between channels using techniques like customer journey mapping.

Comprehensive ODeL PCP design requires a collaborative leadership approach that starts with developing a shared vision on how digital learning tools and resources support learning; seeking input from a variety of internal and external stakeholders; communicating with all stakeholders to encourage buy-in and using and understanding research and data to support plan goals and objectives. Other key areas to consider in the PCP design include operational considerations, incorporating budget, procurement, interoperability; student data privacy; infrastructure needs, including devices and connectivity; as well as professional development (Coladrci & Getzels, 1955).

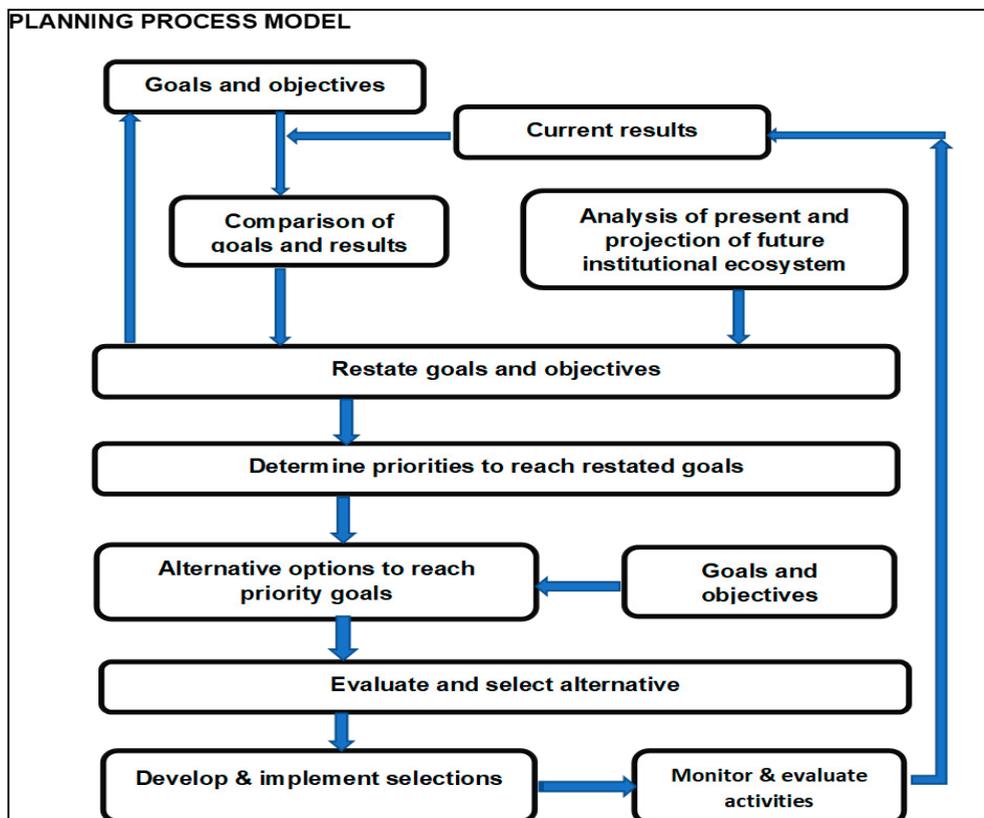


Figure 2: Flexibility and agility matrix of pedagogical contingency planning design for pedagogy (Adapted from Coladarci & Getzels, 1955)

According to Coladarci and Getzels (1955), planners must cast their eye to the everyday functioning of educational institution to construct a realistic PCP design model. It is important, they maintain, to make explicit the problems that give rise to the PCP design and decision-making process so that a PCP model is chosen that is appropriate to the problems of a given area, academic or institutional development. A clear, well thought-out PCP theory provides ODeL not only with effective practices, but also with a frame of reference that establishes the criteria by which such practices can eventually be evaluated.

As can be seen from the model (Figure 2), PCP design is a systematic process that involves stating the goals of the system, determining the degree to which these goals are met and using these comparisons as a basis for establishing priorities. PCP design includes assessing the resources needed and available to attain the goals. One way of conceptualising PCP design is a series of meetings between executives who are trying to arrive at a mutually agreed set of decisions about actions to be taken in the future. In all these meetings the basic question being addressed is the same: What should we do? To develop a detailed answer to this question, it is advisable to break it into a series of more specific questions, such as those mentioned in the introduction.

According to Ruzicka and Miklos (1982) this type of PCP design involves:

- the identification and refinement of alternative aims;
- the development of alternative means of achieving them;
- the identification of the most promising means;
- monitoring the extent to which aims have been achieved and;
- based on the information gained, the means are revised, and aims are altered.

This model implies that there is regular evaluation and alteration, not only of the way policy is operationalised, but also of policy aspects which prove unrealisable.

5.10 Leadership vs Management vs Pedagogical Contingency Planning design

People often mistakenly equate leadership with management, but there are fundamental differences between the two; they are based on separate and distinct competences and skillsets. Management involves a focus on executing of functions in an organisation, whereas leadership is about motivating people and doing the right things right.

Leaders will have a vision of what can be achieved and then communicate this to others and involve strategies for realising the vision. They motivate people and can negotiate for resources and other support to achieve their goals. There is a continuing controversy about the difference between leaders and managers. Some scholars argue that although management and leadership overlap, the two activities are not synonymous (Bass, 2010). Furthermore, the degree of overlap is a point of disagreement (Yukl, 2013). In fact, some individuals see them as extreme opposites and believe that a good leader cannot be a good manager and vice versa (Ricketts, 2009). Katz (1955) defines management as exercising direction of a group or organisation through executive, administrative and supervisory positions.

Leadership is a complex, multidimensional phenomena (DePree, 1989). It has been defined as a behaviour, style, skill, process, responsibility, experience, function of management, position of authority, influencing relationship, characteristic and ability (Northouse, 2007). Leadership is very different. It is about aligning people with a vision, which means agreement and communication, motivation and inspiration. Management is a set of processes that keep an organisation running. Planning processes include PCP, budgeting, staffing, task clarification, performance measurement and problem-solving when results do not go according to plan (Hallak, 1969).

5.11 Understanding equal rights and social justice

Article 1 of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) guarantees equal access to education of all types and levels to everyone and similarly prohibits the limitation of any person or group of persons to education of inferior standards. Persons with disabilities must, therefore, be granted equal access to education-by-education authorities, which is of comprehensively comparable standards to that which is available to non-disabled persons. This shows that there is a requirement of "reasonable accommodation" of able and disabled students in the same school in the UNESCO Convention.

According to UNESCO (2021), more than 1.5 billion students in 188 countries were out of school due to Covid-19 on April 8, 2021, representing over 91 per cent of the world's student population. The crisis has exposed vast disparities in countries' emergency preparedness, internet access for children and the availability of learning materials. For many students, the Covid-19 crisis will mean limited or no education or falling further behind their peers. Students affected by university closures also miss the sense of stability and normalcy in quality education provisioning. University closures may disproportionately affect students who already experience barriers accessing education or who are at higher risk of being excluded for a variety of reasons. These include students with disabilities, students in remote locations, asylum seekers and refugees, and those whose families have lost their income because of job cuts or precarious employment or are otherwise in a difficult situation.

5.12 Quality education

Receiving quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development. Major progress has been made towards increasing access to education at all levels and increasing enrolment rates in schools, particularly for women and girls. Basic literacy skills have improved tremendously, yet bolder efforts are needed to make even greater strides for achieving universal education goals. For example, the world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, but few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education.

Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. Over the past decade, major progress was made towards increasing access to education and school enrolment rates at all levels, particularly for girls. Nevertheless, about 260 million children were still out of school in 2018 – nearly one fifth of the global population in that age group. Furthermore, more than half of all children and adolescents worldwide are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics and nearly 369 million children who rely on school meals need to look other sources for daily nutrition. Never have so many children been out of school at the same time, disrupting learning and upending lives, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised. The global pandemic has far-reaching consequences that may jeopardise hard-won gains made in improving global education.

To protect the well-being of children and ensure they have access to continued learning, in March 2020, UNESCO launched the Covid-19 Global Education Coalition, a multi-sector partnership between the United Nations (UN) family, civil society organisations, media and information technology (IT) partners to design and deploy innovative solutions. Together they help countries tackle content and connectivity gaps and facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for students during this period of sudden and unprecedented educational disruption.

Specifically, the Global Education Coalition aims to:

- Help countries in mobilising resources and implementing innovative and context-appropriate solutions to provide education remotely, leveraging hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches.
- Seek equitable solutions and universal access.
- Ensure coordinated responses and avoid overlapping efforts.
- Facilitate the return of students to school when they reopen to avoid an upsurge in dropout rates.

UNICEF also scaled up its work in 145 low- and middle-income countries to support governments and education partners in developing plans for a rapid, system-wide response including alternative learning programmes and mental health support.

5.13 The right to education to include connectivity entitlement

Considerable attention has been given to the use of technology to ensure learning continuity. Those digital solutions to improve teaching and learning that have been institutionalised in the aftermath of the pandemic need to put equity and inclusion at their centre to ensure all learners may benefit from them. Lecturers and learners need free and open-source technologies for teaching and learning. Quality education cannot be provided through content built outside of the pedagogical space and outside of human relationships between teachers and students. Education cannot be dependent on digital platforms controlled by private companies. Governments should support open educational resources and open digital access.

The right to education includes making a concerted and conscious effort to equitably vary teaching and learning methodologies. The effort must include the use of blended student-centred teaching, monitor and assess methodologies to ensure effectiveness of distance learning: Guide teachers to design appropriate methodologies for the provision of online teaching, or for the organisation and facilitation of learning based on television or radio programmes or print based materials. Design the duration of the distance learning units based on students' self-regulation and metacognitive abilities, especially for screen-based learning – the unit for primary school learners should preferably not be more than 25 minutes, and no longer than 40 minutes for secondary school learners. Improve learners' engagement through pedagogical approaches that are appropriate for their interests and cognitive abilities, including utilising possible group discussion, peer assistances, and peer assessment. Design formative questions, tests, or exercises to monitor students' learning processes closely.

There will be a transition period back to more school-based learning settings during which some elements of distance teaching and learning practices will revert to face-to-face provision quickly. Therefore, it is advisable to plan strategies that progress from the provision of rapid responses to a transitional period, to a long-term goal of improved education provision systems. Looking to the future, actions now being taken to ensure the effectiveness of distance learning will lay a solid foundation for more technology-enhanced pedagogical innovations, more open and flexible learning environments, and a more vibrant education system. The long-term goal should be to integrate key principles and key constituent elements for more inclusive, more open and resilient systems when education stabilises to a new normal. Key elements of this new normal include enhanced accessibility for the most vulnerable groups, upgraded learning platforms, distance learning courses covering all grade levels and all subjects, and teachers with improved capacities in designing remote teaching and facilitating distance learning

As countries rebuild and reinvent themselves in response to Covid-19, there is an opportunity to accelerate the thinking on how to best support quality education for all. In the months and years ahead, coalitions of evidence-to-policy organisations, implementation partners, researchers, donors and governments should build on their experiences to develop education-for-all strategies that use expansive research from Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and similar organisations. In the long term, evidence-informed decisions and programmes that account for country-specific conditions have the potential to improve pedagogy, support teachers, motivate students, improve school governance, and address many other aspects of the learning experience.

5.14 Diversity social justice contingency planning in education

Diversity is a contentious term and is generally associated with the politics of recognition around issues of race and ethnicity (Sweet & Etienne, 2011). It often excludes other dimensions of difference such as age, gender, class, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, religion, family background, and cognitive style (Forsyth, 1995; Sandercock, 2000; Doan, 2015). Social justice is traditionally related with the distribution of public and private resources as well as externalities to the urban poor and working class (Agyeman & Erickson, 2012). Critics have argued that defining social justice as socio-economic redistribution may not remedy the injustice of cultural non-recognition. Since ills of our cities stem from both socio-economic inequities and cultural non-recognition and domination of ethnic minorities, there is a need to address both aspects of justice (Goonewardena, Rankin & Weinstock, 2004). For the purposes of this paper, I use the terms 'diversity' and 'social justice' to encompass the broadest definitions possible, including those that integrate various dimensions and intersectionalities of difference (e.g. race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, physical disability, culture, religion, age), as well as more comprehensive definitions of justice that include issues of cultural recognition in addition to socioeconomic redistribution (Agyeman & Erickson, 2012; Sandercock, 2000).

PCP design education and practice in the United States have only come to embrace concepts and topics related to diversity and social justice relatively recently. Until the mid-1960s, 'monocultural' or 'monistic' PCP design was the bulwark of PCP design education, reflecting the notion of a unitary nation and national culture in which minority groups were expected to assimilate to the norms, belief systems, language and identity of the majority (Tiryakian, 2003; Kymlicka, 2003). The dominant monocultural PCP design paradigm consisted of adhering to a value-free singular public interest that contingency planners believed they could promote as technicians through rational or comprehensive PCP design rooted in positivist epistemology.

One argument that remains relevant today is that issues of diversity and social justice must be integrated into all parts of the PCP design curriculum and not reserved for separate programmes that often remain on the margins of the core curriculum. There is, however, no evidence that PCP-designed schools are following such a path.

5.15 Education planning institutional policy

The plan, being a policy statement, is a process that determines the future course of action and is undertaken at all levels of management to drive the PCP design. It is continuous and includes the process of perception, analysis and conceptual issue. This implies that the ODeL PCP design provides the tool for coordinating and controlling the direction of the different components of an educational enterprise so that educational objectives can be achieved. In any country, educational PCP design is necessitated by varied reasons, which include, among others, the desire of government to meet the yearnings, needs and aspirations of the citizenry. It also includes the demand for education and access to education, provision of quality education to the people, to respond to technological development, and lastly, to ensure global competitiveness and, more importantly, to actualise government political philosophy.

6. Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic disruptions on the scale the globe witnessed are not limited to simple calamities, but may also result from natural, education, health, political, economic and environmental disaster. Their impact on ODeL institutions' capacity to plan effectively and efficiently hinges on foresight, agility, flexibility, readiness and preparedness to provide policy guidelines to students, institutional leadership and management, lecturers and body stakeholders. The flexible and agile pedagogical contingency planners' (PCPs) role includes developing policies and processes that guide ODeL pedagogy planning, leadership and management ecosystems. ODeL is but one teaching and learning methodology of higher education whose PCP design team is called upon pre-, during and post-pandemics such as Covid-19 to rethink how quality online and virtual delivery modes should evolve to guard against adversity, and defining the skills, education and training required to support institutions that offer ODeL flexible and agile PCP design ecosystem, requires meticulous rejigging of policies, processes and procedures to accommodate open equitable distribution of resources pre-, during and post-crisis periods, to avail resources to students and lecturers equitably while observing diversity and inclusion principles. In line with Rawls' theory of justice, PCP design processes must ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are catered for in line with social justice and equal rights objectives, particularly during crisis periods. This is critical for a country like South Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Ethics statement

Before compiling this conceptual paper, I sought approval from the institutional Ethics Review Committee. The request was approved. The privacy of the participants was of no consequence for the paper dealt with pedagogical contingency planning concepts and theories. This is in accordance with the private policies of the research as no human subject's privacy was violated.

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