ACADEMIC EMERGENT STRATEGIES AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

Experiential learning, whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, in the context of crisis gives rise to emergent strategies that are unintended, flexible and open to change and evolution. The purpose of this research is to explore how emergent teaching strategies in education develop from experiential learning cycles. The emergent environmental circumstance in the context of this study is the COVID-19 crisis. A contribution of this study is that it brings together a theory that has its roots in the world of management (emergent strategies) with another that has roots in the field of education (experiential learning cycle). 16 academics are the participants in this qualitative research study that uses focus groups for data collection that is analysed using content analysis and inter-rater reliability. The main finding is that emergent teaching strategies in times of crisis develop from concrete experience, observation, reflection, active experimentation, diverging (i.e. viewing situation from many perspectives and brainstorming) and accommodation (i.e. carrying out plans and experiments and adapting to immediate circumstances). This study provides a number of practical recommendations for academics and higher education management.

Keywords: Covid-19, Emergent Teaching Strategies, Experiential Learning Cycle, Higher Education, Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business world acknowledges the importance of the strategic planning process. Many authors state that well-defined and executed strategies lead to sustainable business and growth (Carpenter & Sanders, 2013; Lynch, 2018; Wheelen et al., 2018; David & David, 2016; Coulter & Coulter, 2008). Considering the importance of the latter, it is not surprising that there is a rich body of scholarly literature on corporate and business strategies.

Strategic management concepts have permeated into the world of higher education. The first attempts to apply the strategic management planning process to higher education practices were observed in late 70s and early 80s of the last century (Fuller, 1976; Doyle & Lynch, 1979; Kotler & Murphy, 1981). It is evident that the scholars at the time were considering classic deliberate strategic models in the context of higher education. Irrespective of higher education specifications, strategy formulation and execution processes were described as similar to those in business, namely, analyzing internal and external environments, formulating strategic alternatives, choosing the best out of them to implement, and finally, monitoring and reflecting.

Notwithstanding, there is very limited scientific research on higher education strategy development and almost none on emergent strategies. Ahlstrand et al. (2001) emphasize the importance of emergent strategies. The authors define deliberate strategies as strategic actions that lead to realized intentions. However, emergent strategies are the ones that initially follow

defined umbrella strategies, however are open to changes throughout the strategic process and are ever evolving. Such flexibility is extremely important when the environment becomes unpredictable, and ongoing deliberate strategies will not lead to the goal. It is important to remember that emergent strategy means, not chaos, but, in essence, unintended order (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

The research question investigated in this study is: how do emergent teaching strategies in education develop from experiential learning cycles? Various scholars acknowledge a need for transforming universities considering emergent environmental circumstances (Doyle & Brady, 2018; Bastedo, 2012) and provide some specific empirically proven and conceptual suggestions. However, there is no literature on the role of academics in this process. The emergent environmental circumstance that is the context to this study is the COVID-19 crisis that transformed teaching strategies in a short-period of time demanding quick flexibility on the part of curriculum and course designers, as well as the whole academic world. This study is carried out in a tertiary education institiution in the UAE that before the onset of the pandemic taught primarily adopting face-to-face traditional teaching strategies and secondarily adopting blended learning strategies. The onset of the pandemic necessitated that academics in this institiutions swiftly shifted their strategy to a fully online teaching strategy.

The contribution of this study to the existing body of literature is to study how emergent teaching strategies develop from experiential learning cycles bringing together a theory that has its roots in the world of management with another that has roots in the field of education. The exploration of this research question is carried out through the lens of the academic cadre who view strategy formulation from an education perspective and are asked to do so in this study within the context of the COVID-19 crisis. An explanation of the dual theoretical framework to this study follows, namely the theory of emergent strategies (Ahlstrand et al., 2001) and the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emergent Strategies

A prescriptive strategy, often called a deliberate strategy, *"is one where the objective has been defined in advance and the main elements have been developed before the strategy commences"* (Lynch, 2018). Lynch (2018) highlights that prescriptive strategies can be compared to sending the troops (academic cadre) into battle with a deliberate plan (the prescriptive strategy) that has been derived in advance by the generals (curriculum developers) and then implemented. In education, a deliberate strategy is one where the educational goals and action plans are well defined in advance and implemented to the letter.

In contemporary deliberate/prescriptive strategic processes, there are several major elements to be in place. Wheelen et al. (2018) describe four essential steps in the process, such as environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation and control. The authors suggest studying both the internal and external environment. The latter involves analyzing natural and societal environment as well as the industry in which businesses operate. The internal analysis helps companies identify the organizational structure, culture, and resources. Based on the environmental review, a strategy formulation process may be initiated that involves defining mission, objectives, strategies, and policies. Once derived strategies are put into action, performance requires monitoring. In education these four essential steps of a prescriptive strategy are similar as the academic is well aware of the internal and external

environment in which education is taking place and formulates his/her teaching strategy accordinaly. A teaching strategy is always composed of teaching aims and is in line with the policies of the educational institiution. Every teaching strategy in action is evaluatied and monitored at various points.

Lynch (2018) argues that prescriptive strategic management process is quite simplified and its validity can be questioned in reality. For instance, among the four potential strategic hindering factors, the author names environment. The prescriptive strategic approach assumes that the environment is foreseeable; thus opportunities and threats can be identified in advance and considered during strategy formulation and implementation process having ready various risk mitigation plans. However, it is observed quite often that environmental changes, challenges, and crisis are not predictable in numerous instances. This is the moment when emergent strategies evolve (Ahlstrand et al., 2001) that are unintended, flexible and open to change and evolution.

The prescriptive strategic process also has its limitations in the field of education which similarly to all other sectors is subject to unforeseeable changes, challenges and crisis. In this study it is the COVID-19 pandemic that, in an unpredicatable fashion, posed challenges in the field of education demanding agile adaptation and flexibility in one's teaching strategies. Emergent strategies, unlinke prescriptive strategies, are realized in absence of, or despite, formal strategic intention and by nature fall outside traditional strategy processes. This makes it difficult to control their influence and has prompted exploration of alternate methods to manage planned emergence (Kopmann et al., 2017).

Lynch (2018) suggests four alternatives to classic prescriptive strategic approach such as survival-based route, uncertainty-based route, network-based route, and learning-based route. According to survival-based theories, only the fittest will be able to compete in the marketplace; hence emergent strategies must concentrate on being the fittest. Uncertainty-based theories put a question mark on abilities to develop prescriptive strategies as *"the strategic process is unpredictable, unstable and liable to chaotic outcomes"*. Stacey (1993) suggests that one's ability to innovate and transform itself is a key factor in surviving. Consequently, renewal and transformation are regarded as major tasks for today's strategic management (Lynch, 2018). Network-based strategic route suggests cooperation through formal or informal agreements with the other organizations for mutual benefit. The learning-based route considers learning as a base of strategic management development. Learning can be at the individual level as well as the group level.

Lynch (2018) argues that while all these approaches may be beneficial depending on the context in which strategies are being developed, the best is the learning-based approach that can be added to the prescriptive strategic approach to find an emergent way forward. In line with this recommendation, the second theory in this theoretical framework is a learning theory, namely Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory.
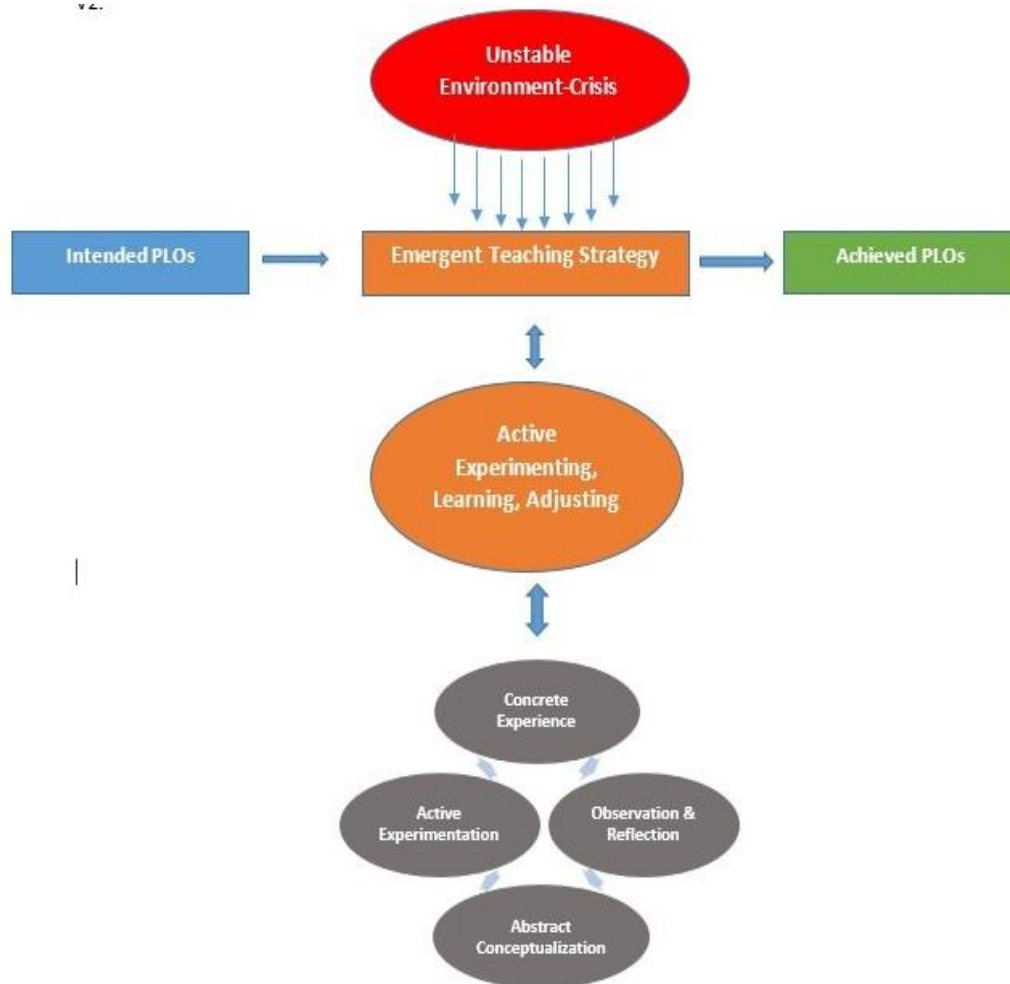
Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) is still among the most prominent theories within the field of management learning (Leal-Rodriguez & Albort-Morant, 2019). Experiential learning is defined by Kolb (1984) as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience. Kolb (1975) define experiential learning as a cycle with four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active

experimentation. The model is drawn as a sequential cycle; however, it does not disregard starting the learning process at any level. However, logically, it begins with already existing knowledge and experience, followed by observation and reflection on that experience. The next step is forming new concepts based on analysis and results of observations and feedback, and finally applying the new concepts actively. The experiential learning cycle can be beneficial while deriving emergent strategies as this process needs previous experience, reflecting on this, deriving new ideas, strategies and action plans, and finally experimenting and applying them.

Research Model

The research model adopted in this study (Figure 1) combines the above theories by Ahlstrand et al. (2001), Lynch (2018), and Kolb (1984). This research model was developed by the authors based on secondary data (Ahlstrand et al., 2001; Kolb, 1984; Lynch, 2018) and prior to data collection that was aimed at generating evidence to prove or disprove the key concepts and relationships in Figure 1.

Source: Authors' compilation

FIGURE 1
RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The undergraduate program is viewed as a product the university offers to its customers (students). Intended program learning outcomes (PLOs) are strategic goals to achieve within the program. As an unstable environment or crisis occurs (i.e. COVID 19 within the context of this research), prescribed deliberate teaching strategies do not lead to achieving PLOs (Lynch, 2018). Hence emergent teaching strategies need to be adopted. The academic cadre design and adopt emergent teaching strategies to achieve program learning outcomes. Emergent strategies are developed through active experimenting, learning, and adjusting (Lynch, 2018). This may be achieved by adopting the experiential learning cycle by Kolb (1984) which in turn leads to achieving program learning outcomes. In the results section of this study the specific emergent teaching strategies developed and adopted in achieving PLOs in a COVID-19 environment are highlighted.

Recent Research

Sharma (2017) on emergent teaching strategies in education writes that new strategies in education emerge from the need to prepare students for highly complex, diverse and ever changing environments. Such complex, diverse and ever changing environments may result from crisis in the different forms it may manifest itself, such as a pandemic, natural disaster or major economic recession (unstable environmental crisis in Figure 1). The author argues in favour of transforming traditional teaching strategies to improve the learning experience. Sharma (2017) concludes that the emergent teaching strategies need to combine technologies and social media in promoting the integration of technologies, humanization of virtual interactions, and personalization of learning. It is new technologies that bring with them the promise to reform and revitalize today's higher education system. Sharma (2017) also writes about a paradigm shift, from a teacher to a learner-centered approach in higher education.

On active experimenting, learning and adjusting referred to in the model in Figure 1, Barkley (2011) writes about how the academic cadre needs to depart from being rigid and needs to rethink and experiment with new teaching strategies that are more similar to that of an academic coach than a traditional teacher. Peris-Ortiz et al. (2016) add how imperative it is that universities teach future educators in experience-based learning environments with innovative educational, technological and pedagogical tools. This will increase the ability of the educator to adopt the process of active experimenting, learning and adjusting from an early stage in their career. More recent research by Leal-Rodriguez & Albort-Moran (2019) shows that by implementing professional development that is experiential in nature educators can integrate innovative instruction such as differentiation, constructivist theory, discovery learning, inquiry based learning, simulations, critical thinking, problem solving, technology-based learning, and performance-based assessment through demonstration, observation, collaboration, fieldwork, and reflection. This has a positive impact on the performance of educators as well as offers them the required professional development to emerge successfully in times of crisis.

The methodology that follows shows how this research explored both the emergent teaching strategies in times of crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the experiential learning cycle leading to such emergent strategies. The qualitative methodology adopted in this research study utilized the research tool of focus groups which is a tool that is apt at opening a window on participants' experiences and beliefs (Silverman, 2006). Researchers were after a dynamic tool of data collection that could reveal participants' experiences in discussion and debate. Researchers were also after the synergy that is created in a focus group during which participants build on the interventions made by others.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

Two online, two-hour, focus groups were conducted with eight participants per group. Eight is considered to be an ideal size for a research focus group (Guest et al., 2013). A nonprobability sampling approach was used given the qualitative nature of the study. The purposive sampling technique adopted for this study relied on the judgment of researchers to include experts based on the following criteria:

1. All participants are academic course team leaders managing their own teams of academics within the same specialization.
2. Participants represent different specializations in business for example human resource management, entrepreneurship, accounting, quality and business analytics.
3. The positions of academics interviewed ranged from lecturers to Assistant Professors.

All 16 participants are academic expatriates working in a tertiary education instituition in the UAE.

Procedure

The group of three researchers conducted the focus groups following debriefing meetings addressing the semi-structured nature of the questions and the procedure to be followed during the actual focus groups. The following eight questions were drafted during the debriefing meetings and served as a guide to the semi-structured interviews:

1. In what ways do you renovate your teaching strategies from experience?
2. How does the statement all learning is relearning apply to you?
3. In what ways have you moved between reflection and action in adopting emergent teaching strategies?
4. In what ways have you moved between feeling and thinking in adopting emergent teaching strategies?
5. Give examples of how you adapt to your immediate and broader environment in teaching?
6. How does your actual teaching experience result in new knowledge about teaching?
7. How do you reflect on your teaching experience?
8. In what ways do your reflections on your teaching result in new teaching strategies?

Moderation during the focus groups was carried out by a single researcher whilst the other two took notes and asked questions that further inquired into participants' responses. At the start of the focus group participants were briefly familiarized with the aim of the focus group and the research model that the questions were built upon. Confidentiality was promised to participants who were made aware that in reporting the data collected no reference would be made to them, the institutions and departments they come from.

Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

Three steps were taken to ensure data reliability and validity. Rich and thick descriptions of the interview data was created. This allowed the researchers to decide on the scientific merit of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Secondly, a full documented audit trail of the study was recorded allowing replication of the study also in different contexts. Finally, interrater reliability was measured as three coders were involved in coding the data independently (Babbie, 1989; Sewpersad, 2015).

Researchers engaged in an individual and separate process of immersion in the data reading and reflecting in order to make sense of the data. To allow for inter-rater reliability a deductive approach was adopted whereby the codes for the theme of emergent strategies and the theme of experiential learning cycles were predefined and agreed on by all three researchers, therefore established prior to the start of the content analysis, and based on the theoretical framework. A total of 14 codes were listed (Table 1). The results section that follows details the inter-rater reliability tests that were adopted, a statistically descriptive account of results, and a qualitative analysis of content including key quotes (given in italic text) from participants.

Table 1 CONTENT ANALYSIS CODES		
Theme	**Code Number**	**Code Name**
Emergent teaching strategies	1	Emergent teaching strategies
	2	Intended learning outcomes
	3	Achieved learning outcomes
Experiential Learning Cycles	4	Active experimentation
	5	Learning
	6	Concrete experience
	7	Observation
	8	Reflection
	9	Abstract Conceptualization
	10	Adjusting
	11	Diverging
	12	Assimilating
	13	Converging
	14	Accommodating

RESULTS

Inter-Rater Reliability

Consistency of coding between the three researchers was calculated using intra-class correlation of paired scores. Values with a correlation of less than 0.5 indicate poor reliability, values between 0.5 and 0.75 indicate moderate reliability, values between 0.75 and 0.9 indicate good reliability, and values greater than 0.90 indicate excellent reliability. Table 2 shows the intra-class correlations for each code after the coding of researchers were paired (Table 3) using the criteria of the highest intra-class correlation.

Intra-class correlations range between 0.9 and 0.3. Good reliability of intra-class correlations resulted for the codes concrete experience and accommodating. Emergent teaching strategies, Adjusting, Active experimentation, Learning, Reflection, Adjusting and Diverging are the majority of codes that resulted in moderate reliability of intra-class correlations. Low reliability of intra-class correlations resulted for Intended learning outcomes and Observation. Intra-class correlations were not calculated for Abstract Conceptualization, Assimilating and Converging as coding scores of 0 were assigned to these three codes.

Descriptive Statistics

The intra-class correlations in Table 2 are calculated on the coding by a pair of raters in Table 3, which shows the frequency of codes as well as the mean frequency. The three raters

were paired based on the criteria of the highest intra-class correlation resulting from their coding. This was done with the aim of selecting coding scores with the best intra-class correlation omitting the third set of coding scores that did not correlate as well as the other two.

Table 2 INTRA_CLASS CORRELATIONS				
Theme	Code Number	Code Name	Intra-class correlation	ANOVA
Emergent teaching strategies	1	Emergent teaching strategies	0.60	$F(15,19)=4.0, p=0.004$
	2	Intended learning outcomes	0.4	$F(15,19)=2.3, p=0.05$
	3	Achieved learning outcomes	0.6	$F(15,19)=3.53, p=0.01$
Experiential Learning Cycles	4	Active experimentation	0.66	$F (15,16)= 4.91, p=0.001$
	5	Learning	0.58	$F (15, 16)= 3.8, p=0.01$
	6	Concrete experience	0.79	$F (15, 16)= 8.6, p=0.0001$
	7	Observation	0.3	$F (15, 16)= 1.85, p= 0.1$
	8	Reflection	0.6	$F (15, 16)= 4.36, p= 0.002$
	9	Abstract Conceptualization	N/A	N/A
	10	Adjusting	0.5	$F (15, 16)=3.09, p=0.01$
	11	Diverging	0.5	$F (15, 16)=3.13, p=0.01$
	12	Assimilating	N/A	N/A
	13	Converging	N/A	N/A
	14	Accommodating	0.9	$F (15, 16)= 20.02, p=0.0001$

Table 3 FREQUENCY AND MEAN FREQUENCY OF CODES														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Rater 1	33	7	6	38	12	13	24	31	0	23	9	0	0	22
Rater 2	30	4	3	47	24	14	39	39	0	34	10	0	0	24
Mean	31.5	5.5	4.3	42.5	18	13.5	31.5	35	0	28.5	9.5	0	0	23
Variance	2.25	2.25	2.25	20.2	36	.25	56.25	16	0	30.25	.25	0	0	1

Active experimentation is the most common code, followed by Reflection, Emergent teaching strategies and Observation, which all form part of the Experiential Learning Cycle described in the theoretical framework of this study. Participants made no reference to Abstract Conceptualization, Assimilating and Converging and made least reference to Intended learning outcomes and Achieved learning outcomes.

Content Analysis

Emergent teaching strategies

Research participants had in common a context of teaching that shifted from face-to-face teaching to online teaching over a very short period of time due to health and safety directives, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The world-wide crises changed the way they taught and participants spoke about sudden shifts to new teaching strategies.

The main emergent teaching strategy was one of online teaching and participants described their better use of the learning management systems, gamification, flipping the classroom, multi-media, and collaborative strategies, such as breakout sessions (My strategy

changed when I had to move from 100% face to face to online; I had to change my long slides into short sets; I had to move from slides to multi-media content; I had so many games for example Time to Climb on Nearpod; I had to change my teaching strategies for engagement and to achieve the learning outcomes). Participants also added that new classroom management strategies were needed apart from new teaching strategies.

The emergent teaching strategy was adopted keeping in mind the goals of student engagement and student-focus (I had to rethink my teaching strategies and make them more student focused). Participants also spoke about the sudden need to adjust teaching content as such emergent strategies developed. Whilst participants felt empowered to adopt new and emergent teaching strategies they also felt hindered in adopting new summative assessment strategies that fit best an online environment. This is mainly due to the fact that they recognized the need to work within the limitations of the assessment strategies of their higher education institutions.

Intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes

The learning outcomes were developed within a face-to-face teaching content that shifted to an online teaching content in no time for participants who were mindful of the need to achieve the same learning outcomes (I have to make sure that all the outcomes are met), however using different strategies. Whilst a number of participants addressed the challenges this entailed some also mentioned the better achievement of such outcomes as a result of the shift to online teaching strategies, particularly due to the fact that online teaching lends itself more to personalized learning (There is a lot of flexibility given to students). However consensus was not achieved on the latter as a minority remain strong proponents of the face-to-face teaching strategies.

Experiential Learning Cycles

Concrete experience

Participants with previous experience of blended learning and online learning described how such experiences helped them in the process of accommodating to a new teaching strategy that was fully online (By having experience it made me more equipped to create activities and modify those I already had).

Other participants had concrete experience in using a few online tools within a face-to-face teaching environment which they also described as helpful in times of emergent teaching strategies. In addition participants with little concrete experience mentioned resorting to training sessions that served as a form of indirect experience.

Observation

Participants engaged in observation of both self and students. The observation of self, such as through class recordings, was centered on one's teaching, whilst the observation of students was broader (I used to watch myself in class; based on that I changed my method).

Whilst participants spoke about the way they observed students engagement and learning (Through discussion boards I could observe if students were understanding the concepts), such as through formative assessment, others also added the observation of feelings and moods using online tools to encourage students to express such feelings and moods, such as

polls and free writing on online whiteboard screens. Participants spoke about the process of teaching and observation (I would jump in the breakout rooms to see what students are doing) taking place in parallel. For some, such observation was what led to more personalized forms of teaching for students.

Reflection

Reflection was a key subject in both focus groups as participants mentioned reflecting on different aspects of their teaching, both during and after actual teaching (I had reflection in action and reflection one action; whilst teaching I was constantly reflecting). The different aspects included reflections on: the crisis itself and therefore the context of teaching; integrating technology in teaching; the impact on students (I realized something is not right here, I need to make some kind of a change in what I am doing because it is not getting through to students); student's engagement; the duration of activities and information sharing; diversification of activities. One of the participants concluded that the crisis was also an opportunity to reflect on one's teaching strategies and to improve them.

Participants reflected on ways to engage students, adapt their content to an online environment, and redesign activities and presentations that are more apt to a traditional classroom teaching environment (I realized something is not right here, I need to make some kind of a change in what I am doing because it is not getting through to students). However some did mention the lack of time to think (You have to be swift and come up with new ways) and the need to accommodate in a very short time span as is typical of crises management. Reflection was in fact followed by active experimentation omitting the phase of abstract conceptualization.

Active experimentation

Participants experimented with various teaching tools and strategies particularly aimed at engagement. They spoke about carrying out short online activities, research activities, role plays, gamification, collaborative activities, and activities aimed at autonomous learning (I tried to get students involved; I keep doing mini-tests in the form of polls).

Participants mainly experimented with a more active form of learning that unlike their face-to-face classes had shorter slots dedicated to knowledge sharing (chunks of information in small doses; I transformed my material into chunks with discussions, followed by a short lecture, more activities, and again a short lecture) and more time to activities with elements of fun.

Diverging

Diverging together with accommodating are the main strategies adopted by participants. On diverging, participants asked students for feedback to gain their perspectives on the new teaching strategy (I started taking feedback from students; understanding the expectations of students, what they need from me; at the end of the session I ask them what their learning is and in the next lesson what do want from me; I take feedback at different stages). Participants also mentioned that the institution within which they work also sought feedback of both students and faculty.

Accommodating

On the carrying out plans and experiments, and adapting to immediate circumstances participants spoke about having to let go of past traditional/ face to face strategies. They spoke about the challenges they met in teaching online and how they accommodated to the various challenges, primarily related to losing the face-to-face non-verbal communication with students, as well as challenges related to connectivity. Higher levels of online class preparation, thinking laterally, focusing on active learning, and the adoption of different forms of communication, such as polls, were mentioned as ways participants adapted to the new teaching strategy (My time was mainly spent in preparing; immediate adaptation; I had to adapt also whilst teaching). Accommodation and adaptation results in the relearning of teaching strategies. Participants also mentioned how some of these accommodations needed to be carried out during the actual online classes as they noted the need for such adjustments.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research was to ascertain how emergent strategies in education develop from experiential learning cycles. The main finding is that emergent teaching strategies in times of crisis develop from concrete experience, observation, reflection, active experimentation, diverging (i.e. viewing situation from many perspectives and brainstoring) and accommodation (i.e. carrying out plans and experiments and adapting to immediate circumstances). Each participant went through this process while developing their teaching strategies.

The research was at the time when COVID-19 took the world by surprise and all had to adapt to the unknown environment based on the principle that *"education must continue"*. Most education institutions stepped in and in a short time had to change their education mode and thus there was a need for a new strategy. This study, as specified earlier, analyses the perspective of educators who had to adapt to move from face to face to online teaching in a very short time.

The results of the research, both descriptive analysis and content analysis, clearly indicate that the context of the study that is the COVID-19 has led to emergent strategies to support teaching and learning . The data confirms that when confronted with an unknown situation, the educators have adapted and adopted techniques to ensure that learning outcomes are met in the most conducive manner. This research is in line with the findings of Sharma (2017) confirming that when faced with unstable environment actions are taken to transform traditional face to face teaching method to more technology driven methods and that this leads to the learner centered strategy which is becoming the new normal. The research illustrates the adaptability and flexibility of academics in general and also that faced with challenges, the academics will think outside the box in order to achieve the learning outcomes and ensure transfer of knowledge.

The content analysis revealed that there was a need for flexibility and adaption from the educators. This findings supports Barkley (2011) and Peris–Oriz et al. (2016) whereby the educator is an academic coach and that there is more use of innovative educational, technological and pedagogical tools.

Another important factor was that the participants made it very clear that training and development were very important in this phase of new teaching strategies. The success in implementation of the new strategies depended largely on the support given to the educators through specific training in technology based tools, Leal-Rodriguez & Albort-Moran, (2019).

Implications

This research sheds light on a very important aspect of education, the motivation of the educator. Through the discussions with the participants there was a lot of emotions as to the importance of adapting and succeeding in this new strategy. It should be noted that the new teaching strategies emerged during the lock down and educators were working from home and mainly isolated from their colleagues and out of their comfort zone. As specified although 'there was no time for reflection', the active experimentation and observation and reflection became a new habit as everyone was concerned about the learners.

The research illustrates the adaptability and flexibility of academics in general and also that faced with challenges, the academics will think outside the box in order to achieve the learning outcomes and ensure transfer of knowledge. This demonstrates that academics are resilient and highly committed to their learners.

Recommendations

A recommendation is that this inherent commitment of academics is used to bring changes to higher education whereby creating an environment where the learner is empowered and more independent. This would mean changing curriculums to be more exploratory and practical. Another important recommendation is the availability of resources in terms of learning platforms and also the top management commitment to the changes that are required.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of the research is that through the use of experiential learning cycles, emerging strategies develop in education. Academics go through a process of concrete experience, observation, relflection and active experimentation with the ability to: be flexibile; adaptable; open to many perspectives; and carry out plans and experiments to adapt to immediate circumstances. This research was timely and adds to a limited body of knowledge in strategy and education indicating that emergent strategies in education is developed from experiential learning cycles. The data and results of the study supports the research model indicating the importance of active experimentation and observation and reflection in learning cycles. However the results of the research is limited to the context of the study which is at a particular time of lock down, work from home and an uncertain environment, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The next step would be to conduct the research at the end of another academic year to ascertain consistency of the data. The scope for future research is to ascertain, in a different context to the one of the current study, that the experiential learning cycles will lead to a cycle of emergent strategies in education which will transform the way we learn.

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