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# Sustaining Collaborative Learning among University Students in the Wake of COVID-19: The Perspective of Online Community Project

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**Abstract.** This study aims at reconstructing an online classroom community project as an alternative to physical collaborative teaching-learning process by identifying the challenges militating against the implementation of an online classroom community project and the possible solutions to mitigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ubuntu was used to theorise the study within the Transformative Paradigm (TP) and Participatory Research (PR) lens as a research design. Ten participants were selected among 810 first-year students who were twice given online community project assessments during the COVID-19 lockdown. The participants were selected using convenient sampling technique because, as at the time of the study, they are under level 3 lockdown. Thematic analysis was adopted to serve the current research objectives. The study found out some challenges such as: students struggle to locate group members and unstable internet access and electricity shortage mitigate their learning. The study also revealed that tolerance among group members and consistent utilisation of online community project are the possible ways to implement online classroom community project in University classrooms more effectively.

**Keywords:** Online Community Project; University Students; COVID-19; Collaborative Learning; Ubuntu

## 1. Introduction

The classroom community project is one of the common processes in the implementation of teaching and learning among universities in South Africa. Virtually all the modules taught in university classrooms have one or two assessments that will involve coming together of students in a group for the purpose of achieving one or two social and relationships skills. Some view this as a way to instil unity in diversity among students (Cross, 2004) where the

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validity of differences could be identified and ameliorated (Meier & Hartell, 2009). On the other hand, some also regard it as a way to ensure interpersonal relationships and promote intuitive reasoning among students (Amineh & Asl, 2015). In the same vein, the existed literature demonstrated that it enhances their social, critical thinking, and inquisitive skills when students work together in groups. According to Kasim (2015), these skills positively affect students' productivity during their study and post-study life. The classroom community project is also viewed as a collaborative knowledge construction (Rimor & Rosen, 2010; Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2020). In the present research paper, the researcher found it significant to reveal that any process that involves grouping students into smaller units to provide a solution to a particular problem in the classroom is regarded as a classroom community project.

Given the benefits inherent in community project vis-a-vis knowledge production among students, the outbreak of COVID-19, otherwise known as Coronavirus, constitutes a threat to the implementation of such classroom project among university students. That is to say, the COVID-19 does not only affect university classrooms' activities, but also the entire world because of the highly contagious virus that sprang up in Wuhan, China in late 2019 (Shereen, et al., 2020). It spreads across the world within the shortest period of time, including South Africa, upon which it was declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020a). Subsequently, countries shutdown their parastatals and close businesses, including university operations, in a bid to key into the social distancing measure (WHO, 2020b). The novel virus's attendant effects disrupted traditional teaching-learning in universities, leaving them with no option than virtual learning through the internet (Dube, 2020). In the wake of this situation, the universities determine that quality teaching and learning must be sustained against all odds. This determination resulted in the adoption and deployment of various internet virtual learning infrastructures and platforms such as blackboard, zoom, Google classroom, whatsapp groups, and telegram groups. In order to ensure unbridled implementation of quality teaching and learning that will not jettison the intention of collaborative knowledge generation and participatory mode of inquiry, many lecturers, including the researcher adopted the use of online community project with the help of blackboard virtual learning platform and WhatsApp. This becomes expedient because the literature has demonstrated that coming together of students to generate knowledge is significant, not only in academic performance but also in improving their lives after schooling (Vrioni, 2011; Williams, 2011; Backer, Miller & Timmer, 2018).

There is scanty literature regarding online community project, but a lot of attempts have emerged and have placed more emphasis on the importance of online teaching-learning system as an alternative response to classroom vacuum left behind by COVID-19. Favale et al., (2020) found out that remote online collaboration during COVID-19 did enhance staff productivity and students' e-learning abilities and reduce campus traffic. Dhawan (2020) analysed the strength of the online teaching and learning system and concluded that it is the best strategy to rescue students from hard times during physical contact

sessions. Dhawan further argued that remote learning engagement is student-centred because it is flexible and allows them to determine their studies' time and location. On the other hand, Favale et al. (2020) also confirm that the "new normal" that includes online engagement between teachers and students enables both students and the instructors to be innovative by creating various strategies to make sure that their duties are carried out excellently. Conversely, it has been demonstrated that not all students and even lecturers have equitable access to the internet that could enable them to effectively participate in virtual community engagements due to their location and socio-economic background (Dube, 2020; Omodan, 2020). Such a fact reflects social inequalities among classroom players on one hand, and the internet that possesses a threat to the entire process on the other hand (Affouneh, Salha & Khlaif, 2020). This is perhaps why Cojocariu et al., (2014) advocate for an equitable benefit to education via e-learning.

Consequently, perceptions exist among academics and students that the imposition of lockdowns that affect university operation in its usual sense has aborted the intention of group work among students. But the intention from this research paper was to contend the exposure and the use of various social media applications such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Blackboard collaborate exist to ameliorate this vacuum even while students and lecturers work from home and from their various convenient spaces. Forthwith, the findings of Favale et al. (2020), Dhawan (2020), and Omodan (2020) identified the significant positive relationship between the use of internet (online engagement) and students' performance during COVID-19 pandemic. In order to achieve these positive findings, the lecturers need to consider various online strategies in their practices that will accommodate collaborative engagement among students. However, implementing any online collaborative strategies may not be successful if students in their own spaces are not well prepared to handle such social spaces. This argument is supported by Burke (2011) and Ryu and Kim (2018) who claim that students work well together when a prior spirit of love, unity, oneness, and cooperation take place among them. In lieu of this, the place of Ubuntu as a theoretical framework for this study is not out of place, as it helps prepare students ahead of an online community project. Therefore, the following section conceptualised Ubuntu in details.

## **2. Situating Ubuntu as a Theoretical Framework**

Ubuntu from the general perspective is synonymous to love, unity in diversity, oneness and freedom in togetherness. This is not far from the definition of Oxford Dictionary (n.d) that Ubuntu is branded by compassion, benevolence, sympathy and consideration for others. In the same vein, Collins English Dictionary (n. d) described it as humanity in fellowship. Tutu (1999) simplified the word Ubuntu to mean humanity and togetherness. That is to say, Ubuntu relates to togetherness or bonding together. This is interpreted by Jacob and Andrew (2013) as being self because of others. Ubuntu in the Zulu language or South Africa decent is "*ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" which means "I am, because we are". Because it is emanated from Africa, Mokgoro (1997) regarded it as Africanism. However, the bottom line still bothers on unity and togetherness of

humanity among the people. In the position of Arthur, Issifu and Marfo (2015), Ubuntu is a strategy that ensures unity among the people despite their diversities. It is also approached as an established, indigenous way of managing people (Swanson, 2008). This is because the togetherness and oneness as an assumption of Ubuntu are obvious among Africans and supported by Tutu (1999), it ensures unity and oneness. This is what is viewed as love, cooperation and openness among peoples (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2019), and depicts compassion (Tutu, 2004).

From the above analysis, it is safe to say that Ubuntu is characterised with caring, protecting fellow human beings, and selfless service to humanity. This is in line with the view of Brack et al., (2003) in which Ubuntu relates social morality, humanness and personhood in people's daily social conducts. The implication is that Ubuntu is a human social relationship which affects the way and how people are related together towards achieving their goals. This also suffices in Omodan and Tsotetsi (2019) who conclude that Ubuntu as African philosophy preaches humanity; love for others and through others. Going by the above assumptions, the research argues that Ubuntu's philosophy is needed to prepare the mind of classroom agents, most especially during this pandemic towards their academic success. This was actually confirmed by Mbigi (2004) who revealed the idea that it helps the development practice of togetherness in schools. Lefa (2015) also corroborates with the researcher's standpoint in which such a practice will promote the spirit of togetherness and develop leadership and commitment among stakeholders.

This theory is relevant to this study because it explains the importance of love, oneness, compassion, togetherness and unity in the success of people's productivity. When university students are pre-prepared with the spirit and philosophy of Ubuntu, working together, whether physically or remotely, will not constitute a threat to their social conduct. They may translate to working together without stress and conflict when professional love, tolerance, acceptance, and care co-exist among the students. If these are achieved, it will reduce the possible social threats associated with implementing online and or physical classroom community project. In the case of online classroom community Project, which in this study also means group work among students, it becomes therefore easily visible and achievable without jettisoning the original intention of collaborative knowledge construction. This is also viewed as developing critical thinking skills, interpersonal relationships among students, and improving inquisitive skills. The presence of Ubuntu among students will enable them to assist themselves in achieving their tasks, and they will also gain the needed knowledge and skills to survive the work place. In order to expose further the trajectory of implementing an online classroom community project in the wake of COVID-19, the following research question and objectives were raised.

- 1- How can collaborative learning among undergraduates be sustained using online classroom community project approach during COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa

In order to answer the above research question, the following two research objectives were raised to guide the study;

- The study examined the challenges associated with implementing an online classroom community project to sustain collaborative learning among university undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic.
- The study also investigated the possible ways to mitigate the challenges of an online classroom community project as a means to sustain collaborative learning among university undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3. Methodology**

The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. This was done by adopting transformative paradigm to lens the study, and participatory research was also used as a research design. Participants and selection of participants were discussed while reflection was used to elicit information from the participant, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The issue of ethics was also expatiated.

#### **3.1. Research Paradigm**

This study adopted the Transformative Paradigm (TP) in order to transform the investigation from the old ways of doing class community project into the "new normal", the online class community project. TP is described as a research process that is aimed to emancipate and transform community people through group action (Mertens, 2010). From its axiological perspective, TP promotes social justices, human right and equality, moral and cultural respect (Mertens, 2010) among the researcher and the researched who have become co-producer of knowledge (Mertens, 2017). Add to this, TP considered the history and sociality of the situation at hand (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). On the epistemological stands, TP generates its knowledge from people's relationships and trust, which is the hallmark of working together as a group. This is why it becomes important to understand the way people do things, talk and react to issues during group work. This case enables the students to work well together and understand their differences as community members (Mertens, 2012). However, this paradigm is still within the purview of a collaborative way of doing things which, according to Dube (2016) is participatory in nature. That is, in order to emancipate students to the classroom within the COVID-19 crisis, they must be allowed to jointly participate in the process of finding a solution to their problems. This is why it is appropriate to adopt participatory research as a research design for the study.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

In order to implement the principles of TP, Participatory Research (PR) was used to design the study. This is relevant because it involves bringing the people who faced the concerned problem together to produce knowledge that will emancipate them out of their predicaments. PR enables both the researchers and the participants to get equally involve in the research process by jointly identifying the problem and ways to resolve it (Khanlou & Peter, 2005). That is, PR values the involvement and participation of all the concerned stakeholders in the research process. Fetterman and Wandersman (2005) describe this research

process as a coordinated democratic process of knowledge production. In this scenario, both the researched and the researcher are responsible for the research outcomes (de Vos et al., 2011). They are also the beneficiary of the outcome. According to Maree (2016), PR is meant to develop programmes that will improve the lives of the people under the study. In lieu of this, students who are the major concerns and the beneficiary of this study were the participants and co-producer solutions to their classroom problems.

### **3.3. Participants**

The participants for the present study were first-year university students who undergo a particular module in a selected university in South Africa. The total students were 810, but only 10 were given two different online community projects with the help of blackboard and WhatsApp technology at two different times. They were grouped into groups headed by 10 leader who were selected using a convenient sampling technique. This technique is appropriate because the students are on level 3 lockdown with little or no physical access to the university campus. One of the predominant assumptions of convenient sampling is that it is suitable to select participants that are homogeneous (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Besides, it enables the researcher to get hold of the available group leaders, who are easy to be reached (Alvi, 2016). All the group's members and their leaders, who were involved in the group tasks, possess all the needed information as research participants for data validity and reliability.

### **3.4. Method of Data Collection and Data Collection Process**

The study adopted reflection to collect data from the selected participants. In this study, reflection is described as when students are asked to reflect on particular activities and or process they experienced or participated in. The entire 810 students were divided into groups and were exposed to online classroom community project twice where they are supposed to perform part of their official assessments. The 10 group leaders that were selected, among others, were asked to give their reflection on their experiences regarding the online classroom community projects. Their reflections were guided by the two dominant questions generated from the objective of the study. The questions revolved around the challenges they encounter before, during and after the implementation of the online project, and that they should also reflect on how they mitigated or would prefer the challenges to be addressed in the future. The WhatsApp group was created for the 10 participants, moderated by the module representative, the representative moderated, collated and arranged the reflections later subjected to deductive interpretation.

### **3.5. Data Analysis and Ethical Consideration**

The collected data were subject to thematic analysis. The latter was considered appropriate because it enables data to be categorised into themes and sub-themes for the sake of coherence (Keevash et al., 2018). Accordingly, the data in line with the research objectives were categorised into sub-themes under each objective. This process also helps the researcher better understand the data (Mohammadpur, 2013). The six steps of doing thematic analysis as postulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) is in fact followed. The steps include; familiarisation with the transcribed data, coding the data, identifying the relevant themes,

reviewing the themes, naming the themes, and producing the result (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). The issue of research ethics was keenly observed. This is important because it protects the personality of the researchers and the co-researchers from any potential harms (Dube, 2016). The researcher seeks the participants' consent, and they were also informed that they were not under any obligation to participate. Their freedom to withdraw from the research process was also guaranteed. Their identities were protected by representing them with pseudo names when doing the data presentation stage. In the presentation stage, the participants were represented as; S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9 and S10, respectively.

#### 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The collected data through PR process were interpreted with the use of thematic analysis. This was done to respond to the objectives guiding the study. More explicitly, the data were categorised into two major objectives; the challenges associated with the implementation of online classroom community project among university undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic, and the possible ways to mitigate the challenges of online classroom community project among university students during COVID-19 pandemic. The major themes were also broken down into sub-themes such as; struggle to locate group members, unstable internet access and electricity shortage, tolerance among group members, and consistent utilisation of online classroom community project in the teaching-learning process (See table 1).

**Table 1: Thematic representation of data based on the research objectives**

Objectives	Analysis of Sub-themes
1. The challenges associated with implementing an online classroom community project to sustain collaborative learning among university undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic.	1. <i>Struggle to locate group members.</i> 2. <i>Unstable internet access and electricity shortage.</i>
2. The possible ways to mitigate the challenges of an online classroom community project as means to sustain collaborative learning among university undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic.	1. Tolerance among group members. 2. <i>Consistent utilisation of online community project in the teaching-learning process.</i>

#### 4.1. Challenges Associated with the Implementation of an Online Classroom Community Project

In the participatory manners, the participants identified that the Struggle to locate group members; unstable internet access and electricity shortage were the challenges of an online classroom community project.

##### 4.1.1. Struggle to Locate Group Members

One of the challenges that was uncovered among the students during the implementation of the online community projects is that they were unable to locate themselves in due time. There is no doubt that they were doing this for the first time during the COVID-19 lockdown. This is what is regarded as a new

normal in the university environment that every stakeholder must learn to cope with (Sharma, 2020). Though this did not affect students' output as they were able to submit their work as and when needed. The below statements explicitly revealed their responses:

*S6: One of the problems we faced as a group was making time for the discussion because, at that time, we were all strangled with other modules as it was difficult to find ourselves in time.*

*S9: I try several times to email my group members, but I can't find them all, this was very difficult for us to finish quickly.*

*S4: I must say, it wasn't easy to find some of my group members and that alone scares me because I don't want to fail, but at last, we won.*

From these conversations, S6 confirmed that it was difficult to get hold of themselves as a result of activities from other modules. Such a reality, according to S6, affects their time schedule to achieve their tasks. In the same revelation, S9 complained that the group members could not be fond of which makes it challenging to finish their tasks with the shortest possible time. In the same vein, S4 also confirmed the hurdles they faced in finding themselves. Therefore, according to S4, it constitutes fear of failure, but they were able to get things right. As for the others, they uncovered similar experiences:

*S3: The first problem was how to find my group members. I tried but ended up only getting one member. This problem doesn't barrier our performance because we continue helping one another.*

*S5: We decided to continue without other members; we had to move slowly so that others with personal problems wouldn't stay behind.*

*S1: In our group, the only challenge that we had faced is struggling to find each other but besides that, we were working very well even though others were facing network problem because of electricity.*

The revelations highlighted from S3 confirmed that, though they faced challenges in getting other members, they were able not only to perform their duties without hesitation, but they were also able to help one another to overcome their challenges. The statement of S5 also shares the same sentiment that it resulted in slowing their activities because of some members who perhaps have one or two delays in joining the activities. This further concludes that they were not working at the same space when it comes to getting together for the purpose of a group task. In the statement of S1, the argument remains the same. These challenges, according to the S1, are linked to poor network and electricity issues. This led to the second challenges which are unstable internet access and electricity shortage in the communities.

#### 4.1.2. *Unstable Internet Access and Electricity Shortage*

There is no doubt that students have to work from home in the wake of COVID-19 lockdown. They may likely face many issues in their homes, such as unstable power supply and internet laxy. This is another challenge that is not within the purview of students to solve. Even their parents may not have power over it because students come from different socio-economic backgrounds. The findings of Omodan (2020) and Dube (2020), confirm that students residing in the rural location of South Africa have little access to



internet. In consonance with this, the participants also shared the same views. Consider the below statements:

**S1:** *"...but besides that, we were working very well even though others were facing network problem because of electricity".*

**S2:** *"...we get delayed as a result of internet problem, sometimes happen during our discussion; as a result, we were compelled to reschedule for another time".*

**S4:** *"During our discussion as a group, others were struggling with the network connection and that delayed us to some extent".*

**S7:** *"On the other hand, we have another challenge, especially during the discussion, which was lack of electricity as they affecting internet network".*

As stated by the S1, the unstable internet and electricity problems was one of the major challenges they face during their online group work. The S2 also supported the same idea in which it has been revealed that the issue of unactable intervened and power supply delayed their group's progress as in the most time happened in the middle of their discussion which makes them have no option than just to postpone their group meetings. The statement of S4 also reiterates that the issue of internet connection results in their delay. This is because the group works require all of them to participate in the activities adequately and they have to wait for those having poor connectivity challenges. In the same view, S7 also adds that power outage that affects the internet was in itself challenging to their online group work. The majority of the participants were in the same page regarding the epilepsy power supply cum internet. The following statements also supported the above utterances:

**S9:** *The problem we encountered was poor network connectivity and not having data to participate on time as stipulated time by other group members*

**S10:** *As a group, I think the most challenge that we had was a network problem. It was not easy for us to get the task done in time due to the network problem because we had to wait for other members to be online so that we can proceed with the task given.*

**S8:** *Other members would come with excuses for not joining us in time, they would say they had network issues but they did not understand that we were required to discuss not just give answers.*

Hence, One could say that all the groups virtually experience the issue of unstable power supply cum erratic internet connectivity, in which S9 confirms that they had poor internet connectivity and even some do not have internet access to participate real-time. This still bothers on their financial capability and differences in their socio-economic background. According to S10, this challenge did not make their work easy because they have to wait for others to participate which in turn is a disadvantage for them. The complaint from S8 regarding the excuses made by some group members still bothers the fact that there is poor access to the internet to enable the students to meet up with their online learning. The following session explored the possible solutions made by the participants.

## 4.2. Possible Ways to Mitigate the Challenges of an Online Classroom Community Project

In the participatory manners, the participants who were based on their experiences about the online class community project given to them, suggested that there were some possible ways to overcome the stated challenges. In this ground, the following sub-section discussed these remedies in details.

### 4.2.1. Tolerance among Group Members

One of the ways in which online classroom community project could be achieved in the wake of COVID-19 is to ensure that there is a spirit of unity in diversity among the students. They are supposed to be partners in progress and must be able to accommodate one another's shortcomings. This was argued by Sulaiman (2015) as harmony among students, which an element needed to sustain collaborative learning among students. The below statements from the participants were shown up:

*S10: "We tried our best to be patient on one another when one was late due to network problems we will call and check that why were they not participating".*

*S10: "We also made sure that we move at a slow pace during our discussions in order to make sure that we were all on the same page".*

*S9: "For the future purpose, it is fair that we should be considerate to ourselves because sometimes, those who did not participate well may be due to poor network connectivity and even personal problem beyond him".*

*S8: "One of the members had enough with their excuses and decided to face them, they then apologised for their behaviour and thing worked out just fine".*

From the statement of S10, it showed that students show compassion by accommodating themselves, especially to those who by one reason or another come late to the group meeting. To ensure equal participation among students, it was suggested to slow down in the process so that to accommodate other students. This went in line with S9 wherein it is expedient to accommodate others because no one could ascertain their predicaments which may be a result of their poor internet connectivity and even personal problems. By doing so, it will put all the group members be at peace with one another and be able to manage their differences. The following statements too covered the same notion:

*S5: "I think it was all made possible by making compromises because group work requires that we establishing a well-grounded foundation between ourselves. This enables us to understand ourselves better".*

*S2: "I create our WhatsApp group where we were able to do our work, we learnt and talked to ourselves politely and respectfully, and it helps a lot to make the strong bond between us and our work".*

The S5 participant stated that the student understands the importance of unity, oneness, love and understanding when in working together. This further confirms the assumption of Ubuntu that unity and compassion among people which, according to Lefa (2015) promote the spirit of togetherness and

commitment to duties. In parallel, what is said by S2 further corroborated that the creation of a WhatsApp group enables them to work together effectively. Apart from that, they learn how to talk to themselves politely and respectfully which will create a strong bond and love towards achieving their task. The above report indicates that the spirit of Ubuntu makes it possible for them to accommodate their differences and able to work together despite their diversities.

#### 4.2.2. Consistent Utilisation of Online Community Project in the Teaching-Learning Process

Another solution proffered by the participants is that the online classroom community project's use should be consistent. This is in line with the saying "practice makes perfect". The more students involve and or engage in the online method of collaborative knowledge construction, the more they get used to it and possibly become expert in it. The below statements confirm that when the method is practiced from time to time, the students will be familiar with it.

*S8: "We can improve online communication discussion by doing it once or twice a month to be familiar with it because we still lack behind in online group work".*

*S7: "I told members that what they are doing is not what we are required to do, I explained everything to them, and they said as time goes on, we will get to understand how to do our online group assignment".*

From the above utterances, S8 projected that when this teaching and learning style is done on a consistent base, like twice in a month, it will make students more familiar with such a new normal situation. In the experience of S7, there was a need to redirect the idea of the group members during their discussion. The responses he got from the group members was that they would get to understand how to do and implement an online project as time goes on. This is an indication that the students believe that when they do one of the more online community projects, it will strengthen them and increase their understanding. The following buttressed that experiencing online projects helps to better the teaching/learning process:

*S6: "We made use of the experience we got in the past group work, that was how we finally manage to respond to all challenges. I know next time, we will not have more problem".*

*S1: "We worked very well as a group. We all had the same understanding about the content in the second online class community work, as opposed to the first one, where we had different views which way we were not certain about".*

The statement of the S6 showed that the experience they got from the first online classroom community project helps them to succeed in the second one. The participant also projected that the next time they do, such assessment would be better than the previous ones. In the same line of thought, participant S1 reiterated that they are excellent when working together with a group and confirmed that the second online classroom community project was better than the first one. This is to confirm further that when the students are consistently engaged in the online project in the wake of COVID-19 will help them to achieve

the intention of what the physical classroom project was set to achieve. The findings of the study are discussed below.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of the study were presented based on the data obtained. This was done by identifying the findings from the objectives of the study. Two findings were discovered from the first and the second objectives. The table below elicits them, and each finding was discussed separately in the following sub-sections.

**Table 2:** *Thematic representation of the findings*

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Objective one	1. <i>Struggle to locate group members.</i> 2. <i>Unstable internet access and electricity shortage.</i>
Objective two	1. <i>Tolerance among group members.</i> 2. <i>Consistent utilisation of online community project in the teaching-learning process.</i>

### 5.1. *Struggle to Locate Group Members*

The study found out that the students struggle to locate their group members. This may be due to the fact that the groups were selected using blackboard technology that did not take cognisance of the student's prior relationships. Put differently, those who were grouped together did not know each other and they were gathered to work together. This action is, however, one of the objectives of working together in the classroom. According to Ubuntu, this challenge demonstrates that people must work together as one, irrespective of their differences and diversities. This is in line with the assumption of Arthur, Issifu and Marfo (2015) who claimed that Ubuntu is a strategy that ensures unity among the people despite their diversities. Yet, the analysis also indicated that the students were able to accommodate and listen to themselves, and show compassion to those who, one way or the other were unable to meet up with their schedules. Therefore, Tutu (1999) revealed that students' intention is to show humanity and togetherness towards people's development.

### 5.2. *Unstable Internet Access and Electricity Shortage*

The findings also revealed that many group members encounter a lack or poor internet facilities. This was linked to unstable electricity supply in their selected communities. On the other hand, this may be linked to the students' differences in their socio-economic background. That is, many students may have free access to internet facilities in their home while others may find it difficult to access reliable internet facilities. In this sense, Dube (2020) stated that students who are located in rural communities are subject to the lack the internet access. In Omodan's (2020) findings, students residing in the disadvantaged South Africa communities (Rural locations) have little or no access to social amenities, including internet access, which in turn affects their academic effectiveness during COVID-19 crisis.

### 5.3. *Tolerance among Group Members*

According to the encountered results, one of the possible ways to ensure smooth implementation of online classroom community projects during COVID-19 new normal is to boost patience and accommodation. Based on the first challenge, the students (group members) must be able to show compassion, love and friendliness to one another. Besides, they must be patient and accommodative. This is to confirm that the spirit of Ubuntu is a pointer to group success because when there is love, compassion, unity and understanding, the actualisation of group goals and objectives are not subject to negotiation. In this study, the students were able to extend patient to themselves and accommodate their differences and shortcomings. This is in line with Brack et al. (2003) who argued that Ubuntu relates to social morality, humanness, and personhood in people's daily social conduct. According to Mbigi (2004), it helps the development practice of togetherness in schools.

### 5.4. *Consistent Utilisation of Online Community Project in the Teaching-Learning Process.*

The study also concluded that the more there is consistency in the use of online community project during CIVID-19, the more the students get used to it and become perfect. This was manifested in the above analysis where the participants were able to use their past experiences to get the job done while some others also referee to the fact that they will perform better if the use of online community project in the teaching-learning process is consistent. This result is similar to Šteh and Kalin's finding (2012) in which the consistent participation of students in group discussion makes them aware of their own contribution, and consequently allows them to contribute constructively to their group work quality. In support of this, Ellis, Goodyear, Bliuc and Ellis (2011) also found out that there is a significant positive relationship between student experiences and academic achievement. Therefore, consistency in the use of online classroom community project will go a long way in helping students to cope with COVID-19 new normal.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study confirmed that the use of an online classroom community project is the best strategy to implement the intention of collaborative knowledge construction in the classroom during the COVID-19 new normal. This was unravelled under the tutelage of transformative paradigm, participatory research, and Ubuntuism as a means to transform classroom activities among university students in the wake of Pandemic. Based on the above findings, it is safe to record that implementing an online classroom community project comes with a number of challenges such as "struggle to find group members and unstable internet access and electricity shortage. On the other hand, the study also concluded that patient and accommodation among group members and consistent utilisation of online community project in the teaching-learning process are important dimensions that could enhance the smooth implementation of an online classroom community project in University classrooms. However, the study recommends that both lecturers and students

should adopt the spirit of Ubuntu when dealing with a task that involves them coming together as one.

## 7. References

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