

## THE NEW NORMAL: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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### **Abstract:**

*The post-COVID-19 era has ushered in a confluence of challenges and opportunities within higher education, shedding light on the behaviors exhibited by its various stakeholders in contemporary society. This exploratory research delves into the complex interplay of actors—students, faculty, and administrators—in the post-pandemic landscape, juxtaposing it with the backdrop of post-modernist tendencies. Central to this inquiry is the recognition of emergent conditions within higher education, whose unaddressed repercussions stand to imperil not only the quality of instruction but also the fabric of relationships integral to the pedagogic and andragogic spheres. Of particular concern is the escalating incidence of mental health diagnoses among individuals within higher education institutions. This troubling trend necessitates swift action from administrators and college boards to safeguard the well-being of their communities. Faculty members, in particular, find themselves at the frontline, often serving as the initial point of contact in identifying indicators suggestive of mental distress. Symptoms such as diminished concentration, an inability to cope with stress, detachment from reality—potentially accompanied by manifestations of paranoia or hallucinations and withdrawal from social interactions and group activities serve as red flags signaling potential mental destabilization. As higher education grapples with the aftermath of the pandemic, it becomes imperative to address the multifaceted challenges posed by mental health issues. Failure to do so not only jeopardize academic excellence but also undermines the holistic development and welfare of students and faculty alike. By shedding light on these pressing concerns, this paper aims to catalyze dialogue and action within the higher education community, fostering a culture of awareness, support, and proactive intervention.*

**Keywords:** Post-COVID-19, Higher education, Mental health, Faculty roles, Student well-being

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper provides exploratory research into the behavior of the various players and actors in higher education within the post COVID-19 pandemic in contemporary society. The conflation of post COVID-19 pandemic and post-modernist behavior of students and lecturers reveals some underlying conditions that have emerged within the space of higher education, that if not quickly addressed will affect not just the quality of teaching but also the quality of the relationships within the pedagogic/andragogic space. The increasing incidence of mental health diagnoses within the space of higher education urges immediate actions by higher education administrators and college boards. Faculty are increasingly the first point of contact in identifying features that could indicate the emergence of mental pathology. Features such as an inability to concentrate on learning, difficulty in coping with stress, detachment from reality with or without the manifestation of paranoia or hallucinations, withdrawal from friends and normal group activities are some of the behaviors that could indicate mental destabilization.

The state of funding for institutions of higher education within an ever-increasing inflation rate in the economy of most developing countries presents a mitigating factor in how much financial resources college and universities can direct towards social intervention programmes to deal with the emerging social issues from the post COVID-19 pandemic. The quest for continued quality education while remaining on the cutting edge of technology to deliver online and blended learning platforms digs deep into the budgets of most higher learning institutions. Are the

average colleges and universities caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place? Managers and leaders in these at-risk institutions are left to ponder where to place the focus - should it be placed in student's services or in financing technological and physical infrastructure improvements? This decision must be made within the context of delivering quality education to a culturally diverse student body that has increased its appetite for comfort and gadgets within the teaching/learning space. Where does the arrow point for increased institutional innovation, effectiveness, and efficiency: lecturers/teachers or to administrators and managers? The increased workload for faculty staff would certainly lead to push backs from unions and staff associations that would resist the increased workload for their members against a backdrop of stagnant wages and benefits within an environment of budgetary constraints.

**What are the questions to be explored and answered about higher education?**

Neuwirth et al. (2020) asked the question "How can faculty teach undergraduate students through virtual classrooms during a pandemic that is exacerbating inequality issues? How can students truly participate in a virtual classroom if they do not have computers, reliable wireless connectivity, quiet spaces, and free time away from taking care of family members?"

Could new innovations be sustained over time? What type of culture would evolve within the student body and among faculty members during this period?

Where the effect of new capitalism funding would be directed to facilitate institutional strengthening which is required to deal with the new realities facing colleges and higher learning institutions in this post COVID-19 period? These many issues raised cannot be answered by offering a one size fits all solution to all higher learning institutions. Rather, this paper will propose some possible solutions by looking at the socio-economic realities and various options available to colleges and other institutions of higher learning.

A cultural analysis of education and its many actors will provide the underlying methodologies that can be used to examine these complex issues of higher education, within the vortex of a post COVID-19 pandemic, and an increase in postmodern behavior of the space and actors.

**Explaining and adjusting to students' behavior in the context of postmodernity**

The teaching/learning process during the pandemic saw innovations and new modalities of the andragogic process. Many university students were having their university experience at the highly variable environment of home rather than in the structure of the university environment. As a result, the challenges faced by students in navigating this new paradigm had to be managed within the teaching and learning process in order to maintain enrolment and graduation numbers. Additionally, the learning process became increasingly difficult due to the expectation that higher learning institutions' students would readily adapt to the online platform as part of their daily teaching and learning experience.

This meant that students would have sat behind a computer screen for hours, which in some cases made it difficult for them to concentrate and participate fully in the teaching/learning environment. Babbar and Gupta (2021) noted that although various studies portrayed availability of contingent plans for distant and virtual education, most of these plans were viable on a small scale and could not cope with the size of the COVID-19 pandemic. The constraints of cost and other structural deficiencies affecting higher learning institutions in developing countries consequently limited the flexibility and adjustment that could be readily made in response to the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. The behavior of students changed concomitantly with the adjustments (drastic and limited) to the teaching/learning environment. The financial marginality of some members of the student population coupled with the institutional constraints, created social settings within the teaching/learning space for different types of socialization of students to take place. The enculturation of student's learning environment which was linked to the changing dynamics of teaching online with limited interactions with their peers while being confined at home, resulted in some behaviors that were unexpected, unusual, and new. The emerging postmodern behaviors experienced were attributed to an increased use of technology in teaching and learning without much social constructivist (Lev Vygotsky) approach to education, as the environment now characterized one that manifested the

essentialist and non-essentialist use of technology, most of which was developed in a capitalist environment. This postmodernist behavior changed both the cognitive and behavioral perspective of students in education, especially those in higher learning. The experience of students in higher learning was more impacted due to the average age of the cohort and life experiences of this older student population. Tertiary level students brought more to the teaching/learning environment, as the andragogic process involved helping adults to learn and as such, required a greater level of critical thinking contributions at this level. The resulting new postmodern socialization of the students was taking place while the wider national and international environment was going deeper into postmodernist behavior, which was being transmitted in real time by the internet and social media. However, Rudd (1997) noted that, "The individualisation thesis and postmodernist theory, for example, represent important developments in this respect, but more still needs to be done to incorporate dimensions of agency, choice and individual subjectivity into explanations of youth transitions". Students were forced to engage more with the attraction/distractions of social media as the technology was now the core of their formal educational experiences and formal and informal socialization.

The reopening of face-to-face schooling in the post COVID-19 pandemic period presented a shock to the social system of higher education institutions. The socialized behavior expected of students and faculty members were complicated by the interpersonal noninteraction, for two or more years while the electronic mode of production deeply affected the relations of production in education. The lack of socialization by one of the main agents of socialization would have a deleterious effect on both the students and faculty in higher education. However, a lack of face-to-face interactive social reality would have a more damaging effect on students than faculty members. Students would be coming into tertiary institutions with attitudes and behaviors not shaped by the norms and values traditionally learnt in a school environment in which there were physical interactions with teachers, administrative and ancillary staff. Parsons (1961), the modern functionalist theorist, noted the need for a social system to have four functional pre-requisites to survive. These are: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. The functional pre-requisite of integration and latency would not be adequately experienced by all the parties involved in the teaching learning process during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Students integrate at school not only for the didactic nature of education but also to reinforce societal values and norms and the development of a collective conscience for the smooth functioning of society. The lack of adequate socialization would lead to a breakdown in the construction and maintenance of social order resulting in dislocations, increased interpersonal conflicts and more mental strain on all the parties involved in education in the post COVID-19 pandemic period. The latency described by Parsons, refers to the patterned behaviors that are characteristics of social institutions

such as the family and education. These learned pattern behaviors make social life more predictable, as Durkheim quoted in Haralambos and Holborn (2008), noting that „social facts" become the constraints on behavior. These social facts were more clearly explained in Durkheim's (1938, 1951, 2001). According to Durkheim, social facts are "laws, rules, regulations, ways of acting feeling and behaving that are forced from outside the individual, resulting in or constraining his/her behavior. These functional processes were shortened or compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic as humans were forced to curtail external physical interactions and reconfigure their behaviors from within a forced confined space. This lack of normal socialization, especially within the postmodern period affected all phases of the human social interaction and subsequent social realities. This led to confusion, apathy, anomie and mental cognitive dissonance among individuals who are now trying to assimilate normality within a postmodern period of social and structured reopening of school and businesses. Herein lies an indelible part of the social vortex. Merton (1968) latent and manifest function can also be used as a tool to understand the postmodern/post pandemic social structures in which higher education finds itself and must navigate successfully to deliver quality education. According to Macionis and Plummer (2008), "Merton notes that people rarely perceive all the functions of a social structure". The many intersecting areas of postmodern life would cause individuals' perceptions to miss many areas of the social structure. The authors went on to define manifest function as the recognized and intended consequences

of any social pattern (p.31). Many new and recognized patterns and their consequences were introduced and learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for social distancing and constant washing of hands to avoid contracting the virus is two that readily come to mind. But Macionis and Plummer (2008) went on to define latent functions as those that are largely unrecognized and unintended. The lack of normal interactive socialization of students in the final years of their secondary education during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic would create many social lacunae in their perceptive capacity resulting in them not recognizing some intended functions of the social structure of education. For example, they may fail to perceive higher education as an andragogic process that requires their experiences and input for success. Reliance on the internet and social media during the sequestered years of the COVID-19 pandemic would affect their socialization within the educational system. During this period, the internet and social media were the students' only pedagogic social reality.

Some of the ways that the social media influence some students' behavior has resulted in some unintended consequences both for the students and the institutions. The social media has effectuated some increased level of ontological security (Giddens, 1991) of some students as they try to stabilize a sense of agency within an ever constantly changing postmodern world.

According to Nickerson (2022), "Education brings people together and helps them to feel like they belong to something larger than themselves". This quote is suggesting that education can help with ontological security. Greve (2018) expanded the discussion to include the part played by the community in attaining ontological security for not just individuals but also that of nations. The teaching/learning process in education perceives the environment of the classroom as a community of learners. The lack of face-to-face interaction during the pandemic robbed the environment of that sense of community. Without community connections, students in higher education may not recognize some of the intended consequences of rules, regulations, pedagogic processes, resulting in unintended behaviors. The impact of the many postmodern intersecting threads coupled with the absence of some social reinforcement of societal norms and values that are generally carried out within the physical school environment of higher education leave both student and faculty interpreting and reinterpreting the social structure emerging from their encounter. Power and the administrative dynamics of the organizational context of the college or university will undoubtedly be adversely affected within the vortex of this new postmodern space.

Many social and psychological issues, some real and some imagined will emerge to test the functionality of higher education in preparing students for the world of work in postmodern society. The management of higher learning institutions must be busy crafting strategies through various training programs aimed at the teaching faculty first then the administrative and ancillary staff. Other programs would have to be introduced to the student body targeting emerging and anticipated aberrant psycho-social behaviors, some of which will be fueled by postmodernists' use of the internet and social media. The frustration of being unable to socialize for functionality within a new space will influence students both physical and mental behaviors. The board, management and other staff involved in higher education, should be trained to be cognizant of the emerging changes in student and staff behaviors caused by the conflation of these two mega-factors (postmodernism and post COVID-19 pandemic) within the vortex. Many interactive training sessions aimed at strengthening individuals' sense of self can be introduced in courses in the humanities, science, technological, skills and social science programs. These types of training can become some of the manifest functions of higher education.

#### **FINANCIAL SURVIVAL**

The COVID-19 pandemic forced almost all learning institutions online for two academic years 2020-2022. The financial survival of education and higher learning institutions rested on the use, operations, and the application of modern technology to the pedagogic/ andragogic space. During this period, teachers were not just seen as cultural workers (Freire, 2005) but were transformed into technology experts, maneuvering different learning tools and gadgets to assimilate real world classrooms conditions that facilitated learning. The many adjustments to the social structure of teaching and learning did leave the students and faculties socially scarred by the suddenness of the switch to more technological-supported teaching and learning and the accompanied sequestering, to avoid



contracting the COVID-19 virus. The increased use of technology brought out more postmodern behaviors in the students' approach to the teaching/learning process. Going back to

Marx's relations of production, the website [egyankosh.ac](http://egyankosh.ac) (retrieved, 2023) noted that: "According to Marx, economic production or production of material life is the starting point from which society as an inter-related whole is structured. He speaks of reciprocity between economic factors and other aspects of historical development of mankind. The factor of economic production is a key concept in explaining the changes that occur in society. He considers that forces of production along with relations of production form the basis of economic and social history of every society."

The higher institutions of learning are now operating in a contemporary society which now utilizes electronic modes of production with some associated relations of production. This is not only manifested in the overall behaviors of society but groups within the society reflect the postmodern behavior in different ways. The teaching and learning environment were always more multicultural in post-colonial society however, in postmodernity, the cultural behavior is now more visible because of the internet which allows the subaltern to speak with a louder voice, that finds resonance with larger population groupings. This behavior is shown in both students and faculty members. The management of higher institutions must contend with this multiplicity of new behaviors from both ends of the teaching learning spectrum.

The electronic mode of production characterized and shaped a „lack of linear“ and an immediacy of events occurring on request or on expectation, type of postmodernist behavior by students. The accommodation done by faculty and institutional changes during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the immediate expectations of students to their requirements, wants and needs in the post pandemic period. Faculty members were overwhelmed by the many requests and expectations from students of an immediate response. This new post COVID-19 environment required a change in perspective by the facilitators and teachers in higher learning institutions. The major responsibility for learning was pushed more towards the students during the online delivery. The length and nature of this period of teaching created a socialization of independent learning in students. They have not relinquished this power in the post pandemic period. Facilitators of learning in higher education institutions are now being forced to adjust their curriculum and pedagogic/andragogic expectations within this emerging new environment. As Zhao and Watterston (2021) noted, "Moreover, with ubiquitous access to online resources and experts, students do not necessarily need teachers to teach them continually and directly. When students are enabled to own their learning and have access to resources and experts, the role of the teacher changes (Zhao, 2018). Teachers no longer need to serve as the instructor, the sole commander of information to teach the students content and skills. Instead, the teacher serves other more important roles such as organizer of learning, curator of learning resources, counsellor to students, community organizer, motivator, and project managers of students' learning" (7).

Students must be trained/taught to exercise emotional intelligence as a tool to temper their expectations of immediacy of actions and results. The social structure of teaching and learning which is now emerging from the new forms of interactions in postmodernity requires it.

In other words, the role of the teacher and the educational environment during this very special postmodern period must change in parri passu with the expectations and socialization of current students. Institutions should anticipate the behavior of students to reflect the social realities of the postmodern environment. The financial commodification can be calculated in rates or retention and pass-out and how these two variables affect the institutions bottom line.

This is not to say that the behavior of the student is entirely affected by the electronic mode of production that resulted in a postmodern behavior. Beckford (2015:131) noted that, "This structuration of society undermines the role played by social relations in society. This approach would also influence a structural approach to education in which the student becomes the object in a process in which education the subject, is directed towards the student (object) for transformation. Nothing was noted by Marx about the culture of the object (student) and the myriad of psycho-social and cognitive influences at work in the social composite of this human being". The emerging post COVID-19 educational environment paid very little attention to the effects of the technology on the behavior of the

student. In addition, it failed to acknowledge the role that the lack of face-to-face interactions and limited didactic discussions and social experiences has played in developing the students “culturally responsive approach. This would have required apriori knowledge about the social and cultural history as well as the language (diglossic and/or formal), power, class, gender, race, color, social stratification, and social structure of the societies from which the majority of the student population are selected by the university (Beckford, 2015:50). The social cognition of all these social issues would not have been debated in a face-to face social context in online delivery using the essentialist technology of different teaching technologies. The cost of social accommodation of a multicultural environment is difficult to calculate but is in need of accounting techniques and applications to include them on higher education institutions balance sheet. The costs utilized on the institutions profit and loss accounts would have been arrived at using the costs associated with that of the hardware, software, technology systems and associated technicians. This is straight accounting dynamics that will ignore some cost accounting factors which are similar to those that were ignored before the introduction of the “greening of the accounts”. The social actions associated with this emerging malevolent action/reaction of students, result in them quitting programs and leaving the college before the end of their selected programme. There is tangible cost or loss of future incomes to the institution when students succumb to their mental anguish, and other expressions of disgust, insecurities, and disagreement, and withdraw from the institution. The cost of the marketing efforts should be reconciled against expected income from each cohort adjusted for aggregate students’ withdrawals, incomplete academic results, and extended stay, beyond the formal length of programs. The social greening of accounts of higher education is now needed to reflect the many moving parts of education within this vortex. The postmodernist environment projects an accommodation of multiculturalism in all areas of public life but does not create the human sensibility for such accommodation. The constant use of technology for social interaction in teaching creates a façade for such accommodation during the COVID-19 period. The face-to face reopening of tertiary institutions removes this thin veneer that some students demonstrated during the period of „lock down“. The lack of normal socialization caused by the social interpersonal interactions in education is now evident in the behavior of both students and faculty members. This educational vortex of post COVID-19 pandemic and post-modernist behavior requires the rethinking of higher education. Zhao and Watterston (2021) noted that, “It is incumbent upon all educators to use this crisis-driven opportunity to push for significant shifts in almost every aspect of education: what, how, where, who, and when. In other words, education, from curriculum to pedagogy, from teacher to learner, from learning to assessment, and from location to time, can and should radically transform”. The level and speed of transformation will still be constrained by the financial resources of higher learning institutions as well as the ideology and philosophy of the transformative leaders and managers. The awareness and understanding of postmodernist behavior and its effect on people and events are critical apriori requirements of staff at the managerial and board levels of these institutions.

#### **The risk of increasing mental health challenges within the space of the higher education vortex**

Mental illness has many manifestations. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the human psyche are still emerging as higher learning institutions grapple with some abnormal mental behavior of students within their teaching/learning environment. According to the UNICEF website (2023), “A recent poll conducted by UNICEF shows that the COVID-19 crisis is having a significant impact on the mental health of adolescents and young people in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

The institutions of higher education in the region are included in this population segment. Many reasons were explored, and quantitative data was given by the international technical bureaucracy (ITB) Youth View Report for Latin America and the Caribbean:

1. Among the participants, 27% reported feeling anxiety and 15% depression in the last seven days. For 30%, the main reason influencing their current emotions is the economic situation.
2. The general situation in the countries and their localities has affected the daily life of young people as 46% report having less motivation to do activities they previously enjoyed. 36% feel less motivated to do regular chores.

3. Their perception of the future has also been negatively affected, particularly in the case of young women who have and are facing specific difficulties. 43% of the women feel pessimistic about the future compared to 31% of the male participants.

4. A situation that generates deep concern and is a call to national health authorities is that 73% have felt the need to ask for help concerning their physical and mental wellbeing. Despite this, 40% did not ask for help. This figure rises to 43% in the case of women. Health centres and specialized hospitals (50%) followed by worship centres (26%) and online services (23%) are the main mechanisms where they would seek help if needed.

The UNICEF report on the state of mental health of youths raised many issues for the leaders and managers of higher education institutions. The report identified and sought to statistically quantify the main factors affecting mental health.

1. *Predisposing factors* “include a person’s or population’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values and perceptions that facilitate or hinder motivation for change” (Mayo clinic).

2) *Reinforcing factors* which are “the rewards received and the feedback the learner receives from others following adoption of the behavior” (Gilmore and Campbell).

3) Enabling means acting in partnership with individuals and groups/communities to empower them through the mobilization of human and material resources to promote and protect their health (WHO).

Institutional programs must be devised and implemented to identify at risk students and provide the requisite medical and psychological interventions as a normal aspect of student services. The clash of far reaching and social phenomena of post COVID-19 pandemic and increased postmodernist behavior can create the incubator for increased stress resulting in the manifestation of mental disorder not just among students but also faculty members. The emotional impact of mental illness on family, social groups and the wider population suggests the need for urgent attention within the leadership of higher education. According to Niazi

(2022) from the Mayo clinic, “Impact of psychiatric comorbidities on the cost of care. Patients with mental illnesses, especially when unrecognized or untreated, experience more significant physical symptoms, higher comorbidities, and more functional impairment”. The overall wellness of the student body in higher education institutions can be adversely affected by a few undiagnosed or untreated students with mental illness. This poses a greater challenge in the post pandemic era where social awkwardness and isolation has been normalized and may no longer serve as the litmus test for emerging mental ill-health. It now becomes an imperative to re-tool frontline staff to have a heightened awareness of some of the features of mental illness, such as social isolation, detachment from reality, low energy states, an inability to cope with daily stressors, emotional liability, and poor concentration, to name a few.

This vortex of conflation of the two phenomena will absorb a larger portion of the financial resources of educational institutions at all levels, with higher education requiring a disproportionate amount of their finances.

### **The emerging technological space of higher learning**

Bell (1973) predicted the rise of the technicians in the (then) upcoming information society. This body of workers, Bell predicted, would one day be the lifeblood of workplaces because of their technical knowledge and skills that are needed in the workplace. He focused his information society theory on the utility of the technicians in the organization as workers supporting the output of products and services, whether knowledge or physical products. Colleges and universities in contemporary society and more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, had to adjust to the emergence of the critical importance of these support services staff whose roles are significant in the delivery of quality student support services. These emerging technologies in contemporary educational institutions provide flexible and revolutionary ways of packaging education to suit the different learning styles and perceptions. The technology continues to re-invent ways of teaching as well as infusing the process with everyday assimilations to games, television presentations and cultural specificity of different racial and ethnic groups.

The technology in higher education utilizes mostly electronic modes of production whose accompanying relation of production has a new capitalistic relation of production that dominates and restructures how organizations operate and determine profitability. According to Brown (2001) “it is the imperative of making a profit that motivates the

system and determines and conditions the nature of the human and social relations that exist within it" (54). Higher learning institutions are undergoing a constant revolution caused by the everchanging technology, driven by capitalist production. The online environment of higher education includes many tools for both facilitators and learners. An example of one such tool is Visme whose definition and uses are shown below (according to <https://visme.co/blog/online-teachingtools/>). It stated that Visme is an online design tool that anyone can use to create presentations, infographics, concept maps, schedules, reports and more. It is packed with tons of features, like free photos and graphics, customization options and an easy drag-and-drop editor that both non-designers and designers love to use. Like other online tools this software is designed for the educator, student or both. Visme is a comprehensive design tool that was created to benefit both teachers and students in the teaching and learning environment. It provides teachers with the ability to create engaging and interactive content for their students in an online format. Additionally, Visme provides a wide range of features that make it easier for both teachers and students to collaborate and communicate effectively in the learning process. Below are some of the solutions Visme offers for educators at any level:

1. Interactive content as presentations and info graphics
2. Visual posters and info graphics
3. Webinar materials
4. Interactive schedules
5. Syllabus and lesson plans
6. Printable lists and worksheets
7. Embed third-party content like quizzes and forms
8. Share news about a class on social media or email
9. Personalized report cards
10. Personalized certificates

Leaders of higher learning institutions might see this software as a very flexible and didactic teaching and learning tool, similar to how they perceive Moodle, Aeron, or Canvas. Each of these technologies comes with an embedded set of relationships of production that will shape how teachers teach and how learners learn. Their utility value should not be seen solely in terms of their essential properties but also in terms of the cultural behaviors that they will influence in their users. The cultural influence of these technologies can be seen in the shift away from traditional chalk-and-talk teaching, to more visual and asynchronous modes of interaction. Students now interact more with technology, such as software and hardware, than they do with other individuals. This will alter their social outlook on how to interact with other people. Technology is a powerful tool that can be used for many purposes, but its application and usage is largely determined by the creators and the people who use it. Despite the lack of explicit social implications in the product, a deeper look into the power structures behind its production may reveal underlying issues of race, class, ethnicity, and politics that influence its usage. Beckford (2015) noted how "many writers seek to explain the flexibility of capitalism to morph into what is required for market survival and capital accumulation" (107). As the society transitioned from industrial to postindustrial, capitalism moved in tandem for further capital exploitation of various groups. The technology of the postmodern era reflects the regeneration of capitalist as new capitalism.

The technology does present some developments for postmodern students. Increased flexibility in learning styles and emotional intelligence are positive contributions of the contemporary technological environment to actors in the higher education environment. Walters and Kop (2009) noted that Online communities tend to be cosmopolitan and participatory, and their activity helps to break down national boundaries and foster transnational networks and social movements (279). The technologies also contribute to the development of students who can be characterized as independent learners. In some regards, they add to the quality of the teaching/learning process. The technology continues to present many challenges to lower-income countries and students, and some cultural groups face even greater challenges, as some technologies assume a certain level of education and class, and can affect how certain



groups are represented in the software and videos. The purchase of new technologies for institutions of higher learning should not be left up to non-academic individuals. The roll out of these technologies can result in embarrassment to certain groups, whether religious or cultural. It is therefore imperative that managers and leaders of higher learning institutions be educated about them, as the associated costs of some of these contemporary learning technologies can be quite high. This is for both

Institutional and academic reasons, to ensure the production and maintenance of an educational system that is relevant to the postmodern period and its many different requirements from postmodernist students.

### **CONCLUSION**

The current postmodern/post-COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges to institutions of higher learning in all areas of their operations. To ensure quality education that appeals to diversity and is relevant to the world of work, these institutions must develop new strategies and programs that address the behaviors of both students and faculty members. Tertiary education must remain relevant to the times, both postmodern and beyond. In the postmodern environment, traditional teaching methods are often inadequate to meet the needs of students, the community, and the wider society. To ensure that school administration meets these needs in the 21st century, it must continually evolve and adapt to changes in behavior.

The infusion of sociological analysis in both social and financial aspects of higher education can provide more up-to-date tools to facilitate deeper evaluation of the changing behaviors, as well as the tools needed to meet the needs of all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, assessing the psycho-social effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns can help to better understand the behavioral changes observed in both students and faculty. This type of psycho-social analysis should be conducted within the context of the emerging social structure of postmodernism. In this postmodern era, society and the higher education community are unable to provide a social cocoon to protect individuals and institutions from the rapid and pervasive changes in social life and education. The response of the management of higher education must not be a knee-jerk one, but rather a comprehensive one that addresses the ill-perceived temporary psycho-social imbalance in society. To ensure that all faculty members are adequately prepared to handle the challenges of a postmodern/post COVID-19 pandemic world, training and development programs must include the systematic study of individuals and groups as they interact.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The author has not declared any conflicts of interests.

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