

## University Culture and Parental Involvement: Enhancing Resilience and Access to Education during COVID-19

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*The study investigated how university culture and parental involvement promoted resilience and access to education among second and third-year students during the COVID-19 lockdown. Using a phenomenological design within a qualitative approach, data was collected from 15 (5 male and 10 female) second-year students and 15 (7 male and 8 female) third-year students from a university in Johannesburg, South Africa. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were purposively sampled. Data was analysed thematically, and the findings revealed that the positive university culture improved the students' resilience and access to education. Furthermore, parental involvement fostered resilience and access to education amongst students. Based on the findings, we conclude that supportive university culture and positive parental involvement were critical in promoting student resilience and access to education. Furthermore, we recommend that higher education institutions collaborate with families and communities to support the education of university students.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 lockdown, higher education, university culture, online teaching and learning, parental involvement, student resilience

### Introduction

With the outset of Coronavirus (COVID-19), ways had to be invented to preserve normal human functioning amid lockdown restrictions. Measures to curb the spread of the disease became the main priority worldwide (Anderson 2020). Many demographics, sectors and institutions felt the disruptive effects of COVID-19, and Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) were not spared (Browning et al. 2021). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds felt the hardest pinch due to IHE closures and shifts to online learning (Rodriguez-Planas 2020). This shift was necessary to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols. Consequently, students found themselves navigating the new normal in environments that were not conducive to teaching and learning (Esteban et al. 2020).

According to Logel et al. (2021), studies conducted to investigate the impact of COVID-19 reveal very little about how HE students from low socio-economic backgrounds responded to this adversity. With the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions being implemented, the students were left with no option but to return to their families. As a result, they faced new challenges in navigating the new ways of teaching and learning engagements. Quach (2021) found that disadvantaged students

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were impacted by the move from institutions' residences to living with their families and the migration to an online mode of engagement. Considering these adversities, our study sought to find out how university culture and parental involvement aided the students' resilience and continued access to education.

According to Lanford and Tierney (2018), most IHEs adopted the online mode of engagement to ensure that the process of teaching and learning continued. Furthermore, online learning replaced traditional face-to-face interaction in HE learning. Quach (2021) found that low socio-economic standing and race exacerbated challenges during the pandemic in terms of obtaining reliable devices, internet access and working spaces. University culture has been placed in the spotlight as a factor which previously determined whether HE students thrive and manage to continue accessing education (Lanford & Tierney 2018). Shen and Tian (2012) described institutional culture as the uniqueness of an institution in its academic innovations to provide a warm and conducive environment for teaching and learning to take place. In addition, Malla (2022) cited that most South African universities implemented Blackboard as an online learning system. However, this move introduced new challenges. For example, load shedding and connectivity issues led students to move from one house to the next within their communities in search of better connectivity (Mishra et al. 2021).

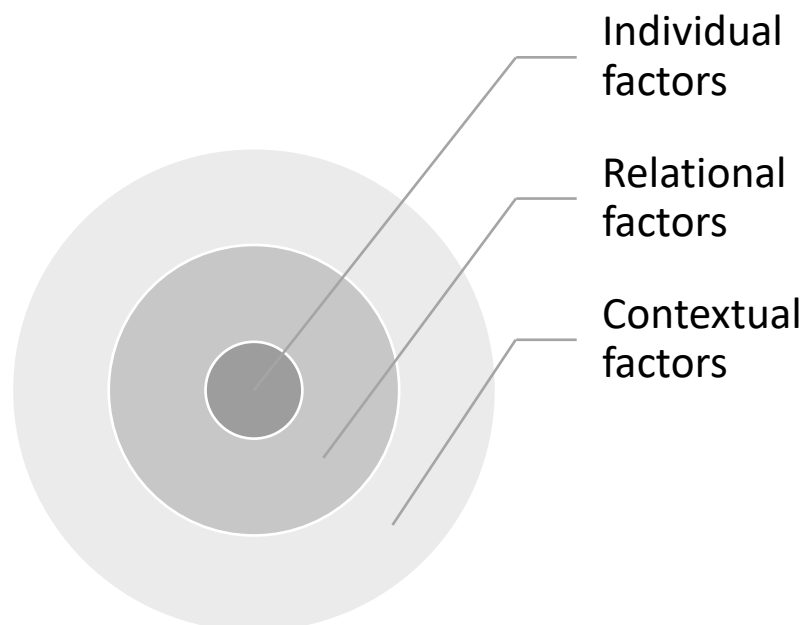
Considering that students had to learn online from home, Gumede and Badriparsad (2021) indicated that students drew support from their families as well as communities to ensure maximum educational participation. In such cases, families and communities became the enablers of resilience. Ntekane (2018) asserted that parental involvement in education is linked to enhanced student resilience and academic achievement. Resilience is defined by Kaye-Kauderer et al. (2021) as the ability to bounce back from adversity. Studies view resilience as a combination of individual traits and contextual factors (van Breda 2018, Goodman et al. 2017). With limited studies done on how university culture and parental involvement enable HE students' resilience and access to education, this prompted the authors to conduct this study as an attempt to contribute to closing the knowledge gap. Therefore, the research question addressed was: 'How did the university culture and parental involvement enhance students' resilience and access to education during the COVID-19 lockdown?'

In full awareness that some experiences negatively affected the resilience of HE students during the COVID-19 lockdown, this study only focused on positive experiences. To understand the resilience of HE students from a systemic approach, we engage with Ungar's Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT). We thereafter discuss the methodology used in data collection and the themes that emerged from the data.

## Theoretical Framework

The SERT states that individuals' resilience is dependent on their context (Ungar 2013). Its roots can be traced to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Holtge et al. (2021, p. 19) defined social-ecological resilience as 'the ability of individuals, families and communities to navigate and seek out meaningful social and ecological resources that provide protective factors in times of stress.' Van Breda (2018) stipulated that resilience is multilevel and integrated. A study by Ebersöhn (2014) added that resilience relies on personal strength and contextual resources, further influenced by the social and cultural values of a community or country. Ungar (2011, p. 1) stressed that 'resilience occurs even when risk factors are plentiful.' Thus, individuals' social ecologies can influence positive adaptation to adversities. For individuals faced with adversities to resile, the interrelationships between the individual features and their context must bring about adaptation.

**Figure 1.** *Resilience Enablers According to Ungar (2011)*



Van Breda (2018) identified that resilience-enablers are mostly in the personal and relational domains and that these domains are inclusive of agency and affective support. As this study sought to explore how university culture and parental involvement promoted resilience and continued access to education among students during the COVID-19 lockdown, this theory was found to be a good fit. The theory enabled us to view students holistically and to explore how the systems around them enabled their resilience.

According to Kumper (1999), motivational factors, cognitive competencies, emotional stability, behavioural and social skills as well as physical wellbeing are five individual resources that support resilience. These resources are an integral part of building resilience and are influenced by a supportive social ecology (Hall & Theron 2016). Social ecology consists of immediate family, extended family, community

members, professionals, strangers (van Breda, 2018) and culture (van Rensburg et al. 2017). Regarding students in this study, their university and families played a critical role in enhancing their resilience during the lockdown. The SERT is applicable in this study because it is based on relationships which interlink at micro and macro levels (Aldwin & Igarashi 2012). These levels begin hierarchically from students to tertiary institutions. Students are part of a social system and all the systems play an active role in influencing resilience. However, our study focused on parental involvement and university culture which are embedded in the relational and contextual factors respectively.

### **Parental Involvement and Resilience**

Van Breda (2018) affirmed that parental involvement is regarded as a resource for resilience. Parents are primary resources for their children who provide the initial context to enable resilience. The immediate surroundings where an individual develops (microsystem) define a setting where an individual has direct, face-to-face relationships with significant people such as parents (Leonard 2011). Thus, Ungar (2011) stated that the individual's interactions with parents are one of the most valuable resilience resources. Harðardóttir et al. (2015) found that the motivation and understanding of parents of learners with learning challenges had a resounding impact on their ability to adjust positively. Ungar (2013) found that resilience-enabling resources in the family were healthy family routines, supportive parents and support from extended family. In agreement, Masten (2015) affirmed that resilience is related to close relationships with others such as parents. It is imperative to note that for Black Africans, attachments are not mainly to biological parents, but rather to the extended family (Theron & Theron 2014) and caregivers, which could be grandparents, neighbours and elders in the community. With the impact of COVID-19, parents and communities had a major role in promoting the resilience of their children. Luthar et al. (2021) found that the resilience of individuals during COVID-19 was influenced by their parents' role in being available and supportive. Thus, access to parental support and involvement was a critical aspect for students to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on their overall functioning.

### **University Culture and Resilience**

Appleby et al. (2022) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic caused major disturbance to university students and had an influential impact on their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact, not only on students' health but also on how they learn, work and live (OECD 2020). In the face of adversities such as COVID-19, Bartusevičienė et al. (2021) stressed that universities and other higher institutions have a critical role in society. In response to COVID-19 challenges, new university cultures evolved and were flexible by adopting remote learning to ensure that students' access to education continued. Despite the challenges students faced, they were able to use the availed university resources to enable their resilience.

University culture is regarded as one of the factors that enabled the resilience of students during COVID-19. Universities responded to COVID-19 by setting up crisis task teams to mitigate adversities during the pandemic (Malla 2020). Raghunathan et al. (2022) asserted that the university's resilience is determined by its ability to continue to function as effectively as before the change and to adjust when the adversities are sudden. Shaya et al. (2022) indicated that several institutions displayed their preparedness to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Ojo et al. (2021) found that preparation for COVID-19 was notable when institutions upgraded their software, Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and development of staff. Furthermore, Shaya et al. (2022) stipulated that students were also supported by being offered remote lectures and assessments. In this study, we argue that the university's culture in response to COVID-19 enabled the resilience of students and facilitated continued access to education.

### **Access to Education during COVID-19**

With the onset of COVID-19, access to education was compromised. The Constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa 1996) stipulates that the right to tertiary education is progressive and dependent on the state's ability to provide it under reasonable conditions. This means that HE students cannot claim their right to education immediately if there are other pressing issues that the state needs to attend to (McConnachie et al. 2017). During COVID-19, the state could not meet the students' needs for them to continue accessing education as it was focused on curbing the spread of COVID-19. Thus, universities and families were left with the added burden of making sure that the students had continued access to education despite the challenges they were facing. Such responsibilities included the provision of resources such as laptops, data bundles, conducive learning environments and educational support. Thus, this study explored how university culture and parental involvement enabled the students to continue accessing education, given that the state could not guarantee this under the circumstances.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was used because we sought to investigate the participants' experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown. We used an interpretive research paradigm as a framework to demarcate our thinking (Sefotho 2018). Through this paradigm, we gained an in-depth insight into the lived experiences of the students regarding how their institution's culture and parental involvement contributed to their resilience and enabled them to continue accessing education. The study explored the beliefs and interpretations of these students without imposing the researchers' views (Mayan 2016). Throughout the study, both subjective and objective knowledge of the participants about their social contexts was empathetically valued in agreement with the description of the interpretivist paradigm (Patton 2015).

A phenomenological design was chosen as the lens to guide the study, as it places particular interest on the various aspects of life that mattered to the participants (Larkin et al. 2015).

### **Sampling**

During the sample selection, the emphasis was on quality rather than quantity, where the objective was to become “saturated” with rich, in-depth data on the topic (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). Purposive sampling facilitated an in-depth investigation of 30 students from low socio-economic standing, who were 12 males and 18 females in their second and third year of study at a university in Gauteng Province. The number of participants was guided by the purpose of the study and what would be useful, credible and possible considering the time and available resources (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

### **Data Collection**

The researchers collected data using in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. This data collection tool provides the researcher with rich information pertaining to participants’ lived experiences and worldviews (Henning et al. 2004). According to Creswell (2014), good quality phenomenological enquiries depend almost exclusively on lengthy and in-depth interviews. Furthermore, in-depth interviews are effective for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are investigated (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019). Thus, we used in-depth interviews in this study, using open-ended questions to obtain rich data from the participants (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). The interviews were conducted in English, which the participants were all fluent in, using the Microsoft Teams platform. The participants were made aware that the information would be audio-recorded, notes taken and that their consent would be required to maintain trustworthiness of the process. Each interview sessions lasted for more than an hour, was conversational, and we made allowance for follow-up interactions in the event of clarity being required during the transcription phase (Busetto et al. 2020). Once the interviews were concluded, data was transcribed, and all three authors checked the transcripts against the audio-recordings for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic data analysis was used following Yin’s (2011) three-phase format, which includes compiling, disassembling and reassembling data. During the data compilation phase, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and rereading what was obtained from the transcribed notes pertaining to the students’ experiences. While disassembling the data, the researchers organised it into emergent categories and tabulated them. Finally, data was reassembled by colour-coding it

into patterns as per emergent themes (Saldaña 2021). This means that the patterns, categories and themes “emerged out of the raw data when it was organised and colour-coded, instead of being put in place prior to data collection and analysis” (Mayan 2016, p. 87). Finally, the researchers wrote a narrative account of the findings and supported the arguments for each theme with verbatim excerpts from the transcripts.

## Ethics

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Johannesburg Ethics Committee (Ethics number: Sem 2-2021-073). In addition, the students consented to participate after the purpose of the study was explained and an opportunity was given to them to ask questions. Furthermore, students gave additional consent for their interviews to be audio-recorded. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to avoid linking their responses to their true identities. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from participating at any time if they felt uncomfortable, without any action being taken against them. They were informed about the educational psychologist on standby for the duration of the study and given the South African Depression and Anxiety Group’s (SADAG) toll-free number in case they needed psychological services after the study had been concluded. The participants were assured that their information and interview transcripts would be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of research without divulging their identity.

## Findings

Two main themes emerged from the data, namely supportive university culture and positive parental involvement. This section discusses the two main themes and the subthemes that emerged under each theme. The verbatim excerpts from the participants are used to support the themes. Table 1 depicts a summary of the themes as well as the sub-themes that emerged from the data.

**Table 1.** *Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes*

| THEMES                        | SUB-THEMES                               |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Supportive University Culture | Supportive Lecturers and Tutors          |
|                               | Provision of Resources by the University |
|                               | Support from the University Management   |
| Positive Parental Involvement | Availing of Resources by Parents         |
|                               | Emotional Support from Parents           |

### THEME 1: Supportive University Culture

Supportive university culture was regarded as a resilience factor in this study. According to the participants, the university they attended had a supportive institutional

culture which promoted their resilience and resulted in them accessing their education during the COVID-19 lockdown. Under this theme, four subthemes emerged, namely supportive lecturers and tutors, provision of resources by the university and support from university management.

#### *Supportive Lecturers and Tutors*

Lecturers and tutors were critical in enabling students' resilience and access to education during the lockdown. Most of the participants reported that their lecturers and tutors were supportive and did their best to ensure that they continued learning. This is evident from Mary (female third-year) who stated that:

*'During lockdown, the lecturers went the extra mile to put extra additional material in terms of the content so that we better understand. Also, there were recorded lectures, which I feel like was something that they used to help a lot of students that maybe couldn't connect during the class.'*

Mcedisi (male second-year) also expressed that *'the lecturers were very effective, and I can say they did everything for the team. They made sure that they delivered instructions clearly and if a student had a problem, there was a quick response.'*

Most participants highlighted that supervisors went the extra mile to support them. This is illustrated by Sphiwe (female third-year) who said:

*'Actually, they made themselves available and sometimes I felt that we were even invading their privacy because we would just send a message even on Sunday and we would say we don't understand this and they would try their best to clarify the concept. I felt like sometimes we were abusing them. They communicated and gave feedback.'*

Mpilo (male third-year) also agreed with this and stated: *'I don't want to lie, they were very supportive and went extra miles like doing tutorials midnight because we would want to use the night data.'*

#### *Provision of Resources by the University*

Research studies abound on resource provision as resilience enablers and the findings of our study confirm this. Most participants alluded that the university acted swiftly to ensure that students were provided with the necessary resources which enhanced their resilience and continued access to education. The resources provided include the monthly data bundles and laptops. Ivy (female second-year) expressed: *'Also, the universities gave us some form of compensation like data so that we could connect to our lessons.'* Mxolisi (male third-year) concurred and said: *'Starting with the infrastructure that was put in place by the university, they did give us data monthly.'* Thando (female second-year) added: *'I didn't have a laptop, so... I managed to [tell]... this lecturer that I don't have a laptop, then she recommended me that there was a loan device service and I could loan a device; that's when I started getting resources.'*



*Support from the University Management*

The findings of our study revealed that student resilience and continued access to education were further enabled by supportive university management. The university management was commended for constant communication and giving students the right to access information. This is evident from the words of Nola (female third-year) who said: *‘If you contacted the faculty, you would get assistance, and our Vice-Chancellor, all the time on the social media platforms, was updating us about the progress of the university and how we were adapting to this online system.’* Vukosi (female second-year) further supported this and said:

*‘I would say that the faculty did its best for us; they attended to our queries and also they would address queries from the questionnaire where we gave responses in which they would try to improve the online learning, asking questions like where do you think we are getting it right and wrong so that they could improve the learning experiences. In a way it actually showed that they care for us. The communication was awesome it's like they put themselves in the shoes of the students.’*

Rubi (female third-year) also pointed out that

*‘they recommended the students to go for psychological services for those who felt that they weren't coping with psychological problems that were free and available to students so that through their constant communication they showed that they care, not only about academics but also about our well-being.’*

Lucky (male second-year) further mentioned:

*‘The university management was awesome, they organised for online meetings with the students especially before the exams and we would attend a session that would give you guys tips on how to study for exams, and how to prepare for exams from a physical, emotional and psychological point of views.’*

**THEME 2: Positive Parental Involvement**

The second main theme that emerged from our study was positive parental involvement. Most participants expressed that positive parental involvement was noted to contribute to improved students' resilience and continued access to education during the lockdown. Parental support was evident in the two subthemes that emerged, namely availing of resources by parents and emotional support from parents, which are discussed below.

*Availing of Resources by Parents*

Our study showed that parents availed resources that were needed by the students to continue accessing education. This became a factor that enhanced their resilience during the lockdown. As evidenced by most of the participants, their parents went the extra mile to provide them with data bundles and laptops to use for

online learning. Leko (female second-year) expressed the following: *'The positive side about my learning experience during lockdown is that my parents tried, they went the extra mile and bought a router for me.'* Echoing Leko's sentiments, Kevin (male second-year) also mentioned: *'Even though my parents are poor, my family sacrificed to provide me with a router and data bundles ... so I would be able to attend classes.'* Tuli (female third-year) added: *'When I did not have a laptop last year my father was able to organise one at the beginning of the second semester; he borrowed money to buy me the laptop as it was very difficult to use a phone.'* Kay (male second-year) also had a similar experience as Tuli and said: *'My adoptive mother was supportive and she just wanted me to just pass my academic year. She got me a router and borrowed a laptop for me.'*

### *Emotional Support from Parents*

Emotional support has been known to enhance resilience in the face of adversity (Theron 2016). Given that the lockdown resulted in a lot of emotional distress for many (Le Grange 2020), HE students were not spared. Our study revealed that the impact of COVID-19 on the emotional distress of participants was lessened by the support rendered by their parents. This also included support from other family members. Pinky (female third-year) pointed out: *'I had a baby in first year so I was worried that I would fail because the baby needed attention and my family took care of the baby and always told me to calm down and focus on my academics.'* Skeema (male third-year) also said: *'So, having parents that normally check up on you from time to time was good because you wouldn't find yourself feeling down or feeling demotivated because you knew that parents would be there.'* Siya (male second-year) supported this by saying: *'My parents were the ones who gave me hope and took control even if it was difficult, but they helped me to adapt to the new way of learning. So that's the thing that kept me going, so I don't think I would be here if my parents were not supportive.'* Lilly (female second-year) agreed by saying: *'Emotionally, my father had been there and supportive even when I was lazing around he pushed me to get schoolwork done.'*

### **Discussion**

The focus of this study was on the positive role played by university culture and parental involvement in enhancing student resilience and continued access to education during the COVID-19 lockdown. Our findings in relation to the resilience enablers portrayed in Figure 1, generally showed that despite challenges that were encountered by the students, their universities and parents assisted to lessen the impact by responding positively. Teaching staff have been noted as a critical part of young people's social ecologies and a source of resilience (Ungar et al. 2014).

In South Africa, Black African females are the most marginalised part of the population. This is also evident with the number of Black female students in our study, which outnumbered the males. Thus, lecturers have a critical role to play in enhancing the resilience not just of female black students but also of male students

(Ungar et al. 2014). This was the case in our study where the students found that lecturers' supportive nature with online learning during lockdown was a source of resilience which also enabled them to continue accessing education. Theron (2016) argued that teachers who facilitate youth resilience are found to be empathetic to students' problems and tend to support students with the problems they face. This was clear in our study where participants praised their lecturers for doing their best to understand and support them with their learning during lockdown. This enhanced their resilience during the difficult times.

Although not all lecturers can facilitate resilience among students, our findings show that a majority of the lecturers were doing this, and they are commended for doing so. Our study further found that tutors' supportive nature enhanced students' resilience during the lockdown. These findings are in line with those of Simons et al. (2018) who found that students in their study rated the highly supportive nature of their tutors who gave them tailored and detailed feedback on their assignments. In our case, the tutors even went the extra mile, holding tutorials outside their contracted times. While Kosse et al. (2020) argued that online tutoring may not be easy due to geographical distance, our findings show that this was not a barrier; rather, the positive student-tutor relationship enhanced the students' resilience and access to education. Like what Simons et al. (2018) found, the tutors in our study were influential in assisting students to adjust to the new normal and promoted students' learning through provision of timely and appropriate feedback and support.

According to Bashorun et al. (2021), it is the responsibility of tertiary education institutions to provide quality education for their students. This can be achieved through the provision of necessary teaching and learning resources. Participants in our study confirmed that their resilience and ability to access education was enhanced by the efforts made by their university in providing them with data bundles and laptops. Although some indicated that the data bundles were not always enough, they acknowledged how the allocation reduced their stress and helped them to carry out their studies. During the lockdown, this responsibility was put to the test, as HE institutions had to ensure that students continued to enjoy quality education, despite the sudden change of ways of teaching and learning. Students were supposed to continue learning and accessing educational materials. With the changeover to online learning, this meant that some students from low socioeconomic backgrounds faced challenges, as they did not have the required resources to continue learning. This could result in stress and lack of resilience for some. Awoke et al. (2021) argued that the provision of required resources is essential to assist students in coping with stress and other mental health problems. du Plessis et al. (2022) stated that universities appealed to public and private sectors to help disadvantaged students with data and laptops to enable them to continue learning remotely. Thus, in our study, it was evident that the participants' university played a vital role in meeting students' needs of data bundles and loaning some students laptops to use during lockdown. As confirmed by our participants, the provision of the required resources to students to continue accessing education reduced the impact of stress. Raffaelli et al. (2013) further argued that in some cases such effects can be totally eradicated. Thus, the critical role of HE institutions in enhancing student resilience and facilitating continued learning for disadvantaged students is highlighted.

When considering the role played by university management in facilitating resilience and access to education during the lockdown, our study found that this was positive. This is in line with Appolloni et al. (2021) who argued that strong leadership and effective communication with all stakeholders contribute to promoting resilience. Dohaney et al. (2020) further supported that institutional factors such as leadership and communication strategies are resilience enablers. In our study, communication from university management and good leadership at all levels enabled students to be resilient and continue toward their educational goals. Kaye-Kauderer et al. (2021) posit that trust and institutional support can assist students to cope during a pandemic. Thus, open communication, seeking feedback from students and implementing suggestions for change all work to build trust in students. This can, in turn, promote resilience as students will develop confidence in their institution. Our findings further support those of Appolloni et al. (2021) who found that effective leadership and communication were critical factors in facilitating resilience among their participants.

With the new mode of teaching and learning engagement during the COVID-19 lockdown, the participants in this study reported that the provision of resources by their parents ensured continued access to education and strengthened their resilience. In addition to data bundles and internet routers, the resources required included reliable mobile phones, tablets and computers. Logically, for parents to provide the necessary resources, they needed to be in a good financial standing. Our study findings are also in line with a study that specifically investigated the resilience of Black South African university students and linked improved resilience to how parents urgently sourced funds to provide learning resources (Dass-Brailsford 2005). Similarly, our participants reported that improved resilience and continued access to education meant that the psychological impact of the COVID-19 lockdown was minimal.

Masten (2015, p. 152) also postulates that students whose parents provide the necessary educational resources seldom report any impact on their psychological well-being in the duration of their studies. In support of this claim, adults who are successful in life despite having faced adversities during their studies, often describe their families as “extraordinarily supportive” (Ofiesh & Mather 2013, p. 339). This was the case in our study when it became clear that our participants described their parents as extremely supportive. This support included parents who continued to encourage academic progress through the provision of educational resources. Studies conducted on the resilience of youth from sub-Saharan Africa confirm that it is the role of parents to assist their children to mitigate the impact of unavoidable adversity (Camfield 2012). The same finding emerged when the resilience of South African learners was researched (van Breda 2018). Echoing the documented literature, the availing of resources by parents during the COVID-19 lockdown emerged as one of the factors that enhanced the students’ resilience in this study.

In addition to the provision of educational resources, parents also played a role in enhancing the students’ resilience, through providing emotional support during the lockdown. This supports claims by Romero et al. (2014) that emotionally supportive parents promote resilience by reducing the impact of adversity. Emotionally supportive parents may not be able to prevent adversity, but they can offer comfort and support

children in adjusting and making meaning of the experiences of adversity. In this study, it could not be ignored how most participants mentioned their female parental figures as those who were mostly available to provide emotional support. This finding supports Zulu (2019), who postulates that women parent-figures are prominent in accounts of the enhanced resilience of African adolescents. In South Africa, this prominence could, potentially, be explained by contextual realities that women head 28.6% of nuclear households and 49.9% of extended family households (Ratele & Mzikazi 2018). Often, fathers are absent from these households because they are migrant workers, deceased, unwelcome or unknown (Padi et al. 2014). Moreover, women's prominence could also be explained by traditional Black African families' perpetuation of gender stereotypes, that tend to confine women to subservient and caregiving roles (Khosa-Nkatini et al. 2023). In line with our study findings, only two out of thirty participants mentioned male parents' involvement. Hence this study confirms the literature on the patterns within Black African communities.

### **Conclusion and Implication for Practice**

The shift from face-to-face teaching and learning to online learning at HE institutions introduced several adversities to students across the globe. This shift aggravated the adversities students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were already facing. Since resilience is visible amid hardships (Ungar 2013), the study investigated how university culture and parental involvement enhanced students' resilience and access to education during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Reaffirming prior studies' findings on resilience, our study found that several factors enhanced students' resilience when faced with adversities during lockdown. Specifically in our study, these factors included a supportive university culture and positive parental involvement. Within the university culture, supportive lecturing staff and tutors, provision of resources by the university and supportive university management enabled students to be resilient and offered them opportunities to access education despite online learning challenges. Positive parental involvement was also evident in enhancing resilience and access to education through availing of resources and emotional support to students. The study was limited to only one university and 30 students, which limited generalisation of findings. However, the aim was not to generalise, but to gain a deeper understanding of the role played by the university and parents in enhancing resilience and continued access to education during lockdown.

This study provided insights into the critical role the university stakeholders and parents played in fostering students' resilience and ensuring that students' education was not compromised. Despite their low socioeconomic backgrounds, parents were proactive in fulfilling their parental role by providing their children with emotional support and educational resources. Thus, they enabled the resilience of their children.

Although the university and parents played their role in assisting students to buffer the adversities students faced, no collaboration between the university and parents was reported in this study. Therefore, the authors recommend the adoption

of HE institution-family-community collaborations going forward, and innovative ways should be considered to initiate this collaboration. Future research should therefore focus on innovative ways to promote the proposed collaboration.

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