

An investigation into the changing constructs of Psychological Immunity in Academic context Amidst COVID-19

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Abstract: Background: The present research has been initiated in the backdrop of Covid-19 Pandemic and henceforth, acknowledges the psychological impact of the disease followed by global lockdown on human lives. The study analyzes the challenges faced by academic fraternity i.e., teachers, students, and policy makers, owing to complete lockdown of educational machinery, introduction of digital learning and changing skillset of teachers and students in the new normal.

Methods: The present research work has been conducted following the approach of extensive narrative analysis during the period of March 2020 to Aug 2020, in order to understand the changing psychological constructs for teachers and students to cope with evolving educational transformations, post complete lockdown of educational institutions.

Results: Initial understanding of the existing dimensions of educational psychology confirm that psychological interventions have been largely confined to conventional physical classroom scenarios. Since the lockdown has shaken this prime setting and given rise to a naïve concept of virtual classroom, the present study invokes the idea of readjusting the constructs of educational psychology to cope with the evolving dimensions of online classroom learning around the globe. The study further provides a framework for understanding the key factors that determine the psychological immunity among teachers and students, which have been redefined.

Conclusions: The study concludes that redefined dimensions of Self Identity, Academic resilience, Adaptability and Emotional Intelligence emerged as strong contributors to the concept of psychological immunity of teachers, which are found crucial in dealing with the ongoing global disruption of education during the pandemic. Based on these findings, researchers further offer psychological interventions necessary for coping and embracing the digital upheavals in academic sector. The study further presents a rich figurative analysis of redefined psychological immunity constructs, using the Psychological Immunisation Process of Self Organisation (Hiver, 2015) which replicates the current psychological well-being of academic stakeholders in the wake of COVID-19.

Keywords: Psychological Immunity, COVID-19, Psychological wellbeing, Educational Psychology, Positive Psychology, Blended Learning, Virtual Teaching

1. Introduction: Outlining the Psychological Impact of COVID-19 in Academic context

1.1 Outbreak of Covid-19 and Its Impact on Human Life

Year 2020 marked the beginning of a universal concern for pandemic caused by COVID-19 (CoronaVirusDisease2019). Covid-19 is known to be highly infectious disease, has a long incubation period. Owing to the widespread and infectious tentacles of Covid-19 on global cities, the National Health Commission declared it as a B type infectious disease officially on 20 January, 2020 (Li, Wang, Xue, & Zhao, 2020). Because of the uncertainty and low predictability surrounding this deadly disease, the impact of COVID-19 is not confined only to people's physical health, but also affect people's mental health, especially in terms of emotions and cognition.

According to Behavioral Immune System theory, Potential disease threat is likely to develop negative emotions (e.g., aversion, anxiety, etc.) and negative cognitive assessment for self-protection among people. In initial stages of potential threat followed by lockdown, people developed avoidant behaviors and obeyed social isolation norms strictly. According to stress theory and perceived risk theory stated by Li, Wang, Xue, & Zhao, (2020), negative emotions triggered with public health emergencies affect cognitive assessment as well. The long-term exposure to such negative emotions is likely to reduce the immune function of people and destroy the balance of their normal physiological mechanisms.

In the literature of educational psychology studies, the deteriorating psychological immunity amidst COVID-19 has been treated equivalent to "cost" and thus, termed as "reduced psychological capital" of an entity be it individual or organisation or community at large. Exploring further, the available evidences in the research of COVID-19, highlight strong and inevitable strains of anxiety and fear as the most common psychological reactions of people. Research by Anjum, (2020) conducted in Pakistan reported probability of developing excessive fears of death and pain and fear of self-isolation as well as isolation by others caused due to social distancing. Similar findings were reported by Talidong & Toquero, (2020) as population of Filipinos showed signs of deteriorating psychological immunity due to prolonged social isolation demonstrated through feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

All these developments pressed upon the need to study the psychological impact of COVID-19, extensively covered in the proceeding sections of this paper.

1.2 Assessing the Psychological Impact of COVID -19 on Stakeholders of Academic Sector

The global lockdown engulfed the educational ecosystem, severely impacting its stakeholders primarily in its micro-environment. Since Customers are the main actors of the organizational microenvironment, the beneficiaries of education processes include students and their parents, employers and the various financial supporters or sponsors of educational activities (Filip, 2012). The proceeding section of the paper covers the challenges faced by various stakeholders of academic ecosystem and the psychological bearing on each category following the lockdown of educational institutions.

The most integral asset of any educational institution i.e. **teachers** experienced their own share of challenges, on psychological, emotional, and professional fronts. The sudden discontinuation of teaching owing to lockdown, led to anxiety as the most common psychological outcome among teachers (Talidong & Toquero, 2020). Another major cause of worry among teachers acknowledged by Lansangan, (2020) is the sudden demand of online teaching for which, majority of them have not been prepared in the first place. Teachers have been expected to quickly adapt to the new normal of virtual teaching and embrace the process with little preparation, inadequate training, and flaws in educational infrastructure.

Further, an interesting revelation made by Talidong & Toquero, (2020) through a research conducted on Filipino teachers, was that of presence of positive feelings among teachers during the quarantine. 93.1% felt positive spending time with their family during the quarantine. Teachers countered the feelings of anxiety during Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), by spending more time in social media (74.8%), discovering a new hobby while on quarantine (78.8%), spending time with family (53%), and seeking spiritual guidance (30.2 %). Also, 81.7% teachers positively believed that life would be back to normal when COVID-19 is over.

Further surviving in dilemma, are the **Policy makers and, management bodies of educational institutions** who introduced alternative delivery modes of education majorly online modes as a response to complete lockdown of educational services in physical mode (Talidong & Toquero, 2020). Further, an autoethnographic study of a junior high school chemistry teacher conducted by Lansangan, (2020) highlighted the flaws in the present educational ecosystem such as dearth of appropriate technology-led infrastructure and online learning management systems in facilitating remote and virtual teaching and fluctuating internet connectivity in remote areas.

The most important beneficiaries of education sector, i.e. **students** have no less faced the brunt of lockdown owing to the pandemic. Study by Brammer, (2020) stated that the issue of cancelled assessments is likely to increase inequality for the affected cohorts. Further, the trial and error methods of online student assessments cloud uncertainty and anxiety among students. Student assessments are touted as source of information about a child's progress for families and teachers. The loss of this vital information has hindered the process of recognition of both high potential and learning difficulties faced by children. Similar teaching interruptions have been experienced by this year's university graduates who are likely to build their formative years of career in global recession.

A revolutionary development brought about as an immediate consequence of lockdown is that of online teaching which is moving on an unprecedented scale. While investigating the psychological impact of online teaching on **students**, Kaufmann & Frisby (2017) as updated by Brammer, (2020) emphasised about the synchronisation of both rhetorical and relational goals to bring positive perception among learners. Rhetorical goals form a part of cognitive and behavioural assessment and refer to learning tasks communicated to students to maximize engagement, while relational goals focus on building connections based on perceived supportiveness, connectedness and rapport. The research implies that mere inclusion of learning activities (rhetorical goals) to students is not adequate but creating a sense of presence between teachers and students is still necessary to account for positive perception among learners. Thus, the current literature brings home the strong need for adding emotional design and psychological considerations to online teaching- learning culture for boosting student engagement positively.

Furthermore, **Parents** play an integral part in their child's learning endeavours. Previous research acknowledges that in complete absence of school material, parental efforts for home schooling may not be able to serve the overall purpose because of variations in parents' educational background, lack of cognitive skills and amount of time devoted by them in teaching. Though supplementary inputs by parents along with online teaching is reported to have psychological impact on students by creating some inspirational moments, moments of fun, anger, and frustration due to variation in their skills to use online learning methods.

To consolidate the psychological effects of pandemic on academic fraternity, an extensive survey by Anjum,

(2020) was carried among 330 participants related to academic community of IBA including **Students, Faculty, Administrative and Support Staff, and Others** which revealed perceived threat as the strongest predictor of psychological immune system. The study emphasized the importance of mental health to neutralize the negative emotions and hence, fight with adverse psychological consequences of the ongoing pandemic. The study reported that both advanced positive and negative emotions constituted an integral part of one's Psychological Capital and determine higher order emotions unique to humans, i.e. Guilt, Depression, Vulnerability, Regret, Anxiety, Disappointment, Frustration, Confusion, Loneliness, Shame, Optimism, Peace, Satisfaction, Trust, Hope, Happiness, Contentment, and Enthusiasm. It was established that psychological immunity was enhanced with the help of positive emotions, thereby, strengthening Psychological Capital of academic stakeholders.

2. Redefining the Constructs of Psychological immunity and Requisite Psychological Interventions in Academic Context: Bracing for a New Normal

Educational psychology plays a significance role in helping the teachers realise their pedagogical objectives effectively. According to Lindgren, (2015), Educational psychology equips teachers with better understanding of principles involved in the process of learning and teaching which are vital in classroom settings. The existing dimensions of educational psychology have been largely confined to conventional physical classroom scenarios. Since the lockdown has shaken this prime setting and given rise to a naïve concept of virtual classroom, the constructs of educational psychology need to be revisited and rebooted to adjust to the evolving dimensions of online classroom learning around the globe. The present research attempts to fingerprint the dynamic development of psychological constructs of immunity among teachers, amidst this New Normal.

As quoted by Hiver, (2015), **Psychological immunity** refers to resistance to some disturbance just like the body's immune system, which prevents against certain infections. Dwelling deeper into scope of Psychological immunity, Hiver & Dornyei, (2017) further updated that "teacher immunity" enables them to cope with demands placed on teachers from multiple players (i.e. educational heads, school managers, and parents); constant need to upskill themselves without adequate support mechanisms in place and the often traumatic experiences they encounter resulting in emotional exhaustion and burnout (Hiver & Dornyei, 2017). Thus, a teacher's psychological immunity evolves from these accumulated experiences of coping with disturbances and problems in stressful teaching environments.

Until recently, the boundaries of teaching environments have been restricted to physical settings of schools and colleges. The sudden pressure on teachers to readjust not only their teaching pedagogies but also their mental framework to fully embrace the idea of virtual teaching has strained the psychological well-being of teachers. Thus, it becomes imperative for teachers to strengthen their psychological immunity to cope with these uncertainties, disturbances, and changing skill expectations with respect to emerging contours of virtual teaching. The present section of the paper digs deeper into the dimensions of psychological immunity of teachers, which are likely to enable teachers and students to cope up with transformations in teaching-learning processes:

Hiver & Dornyei, (2017) conducted serial in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 350 South Korean teachers of English (K-12) working in the state sector. Their extensive study revealed that teacher immunity represents coalition of factors including resilience from teaching pressures, burnout, attrition on the one hand, and teaching efficacy, motivation to teach, psychological well-being, and openness to change. The following dimensions emerged as strong contributors to the concept of psychological immunity of teachers, which are found crucial in dealing with the ongoing global disruption of education during the pandemic.

2.1 Self Identity:

The recent literature implicates the concept of 'self identity' as a key determinant of teachers' motivation, instructional effectiveness, psychological well-being, and persistence in the profession. The burgeoning research in the field of educational psychology upholds that, a teacher's ability to reflect on the negative experiences in adversity, their openness to change and work out positive resolution strengthens their self identity, thereby, leading to enhanced psychological immunity as an outcome (Golombek and Johnson, 2004) as quoted by (HIVER & DORNYEI, 2017). The concept of self identity has been derived from existing elements of "Self-concept" or "self-organization" of teacher's identity and is further explained by psychological immunization process of self-organization (Hiver, 2015) in following four stages:

- (1) triggering
- (2) coupling;
- (3) re-alignment and
- (4) stabilization.

The triggering effect was initiated with the sudden lockdown acting as a disturbance which moved teachers out of their comfort zone., left teachers with feelings of vulnerability and insecurity, it was followed by coupling stage in which teachers exhibited coping mechanism

i.e. coping behaviors such as spending time in isolation, quarantine, picking a new hobby and spending time with family, thus moving in safe direction. Then the teachers entered the realignment stage whereby they have

been trying to deal and control the current disturbances i.e., adjusting their daily routine to work from home model, adapting to virtual teaching culture and retaining their productivity. It is this ability of self-organization amidst adverse situations that strengthen teacher's identity and builds psychological immunity. The last stage of stabilization is where the teachers not only solidify this new identity but prepare themselves for future disturbances through such experiential knowledge gained from the events.

Thus, the reconstruction of psychological immunity needs to be focused on realignment of teachers and stabilising component. Since it is an ongoing process amidst the pandemic, it is scantily explored territory and is continuing with lot of trial-n-error approach. Nevertheless, various initiatives are being taken in form of trainings for online teaching competencies and skill building in blended learning which are discussed at length by the researchers.

Toquero, (2020) divulged the importance of online driven competencies among the teaching fraternity of Philipines in the areas of planning, implementing, and assessing the performance of their students. In order to imbibe technological culture among students and teachers, Lansangan, (2020) suggested an ideal amalgamation of asynchronous (pre-recorded flipped sessions, use of emails or blog posts) and synchronous (real-time live sessions delivered through live video conferencing) on-line teaching tools for effective delivery. On similar lines, the Government of India along with the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD) initiated online teaching culture through Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA), a National Teachers Platform for India, e-PATSHALA, and National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) For school education. For Higher Education, MHRD has suggested Study Webs of Active- Learning for Young Aspirant Mind (SWAYAM) and SWAYAM PRABHA that are free of cost (Agrawal, Sharma, & Singh, 2020).

A study by Aavgerinou & Moros, (2020) conducted at Elementary School at the American Community Schools (ACS) Athens, Greece deserves a special mention as it introduced an action research-based, disruptive intervention using a 5-Phase Process where in 1. the school shared parent communication in a daily, internal log called Virtual Stories which were shared on social media 2. Parents were sent letters weekly or biweekly to ensure open and transparent communication with school authorities. 3. Student feedback and problems were gathered through surveys they completed via their daily assignments in a synchronous or asynchronous lesson. 4. Professional development of teachers was implemented for elevating the requisite skills. 5. The most important and often ignored element of online teaching i.e, emotional support was provided to individuals through special team meetings. the results showed an improvement in comfort level of teachers, thereby improving their psychological immunity through such programs

2.2 Academic Resilience and Adaptivity

Another dimension of psychological immunity surfaced in the existing literature which helps to fight the uncertainty and disturbances is the construct of Resilience (Hiver, 2015).

According to dynamic system theory mentioned by Hiver & Dornyei, (2017) in their exploratory case study on language teachers in South Korea, Resilience emerges to be a measure of strength for teacher's psychological immunity. It was further concluded that resilience is the most promising trait of individual's quality that enables teachers to survive in the profession and function effectively through adverse circumstances, risky scenarios and extreme hardships encountered in teaching environments. "Academic resilience simply refers to the use of all the resources available in a productive way to achieve learning success with the students in the face of adversity and detrimental conditions" (Day and Gu 2014) quoted by (Hiver, 2015). Its competences make the individuals able to tackle stress. The ongoing disruption in education scenario emphasizes the need for teachers to not only tackle and deal with stressful uncertain circumstances but also use adaptive functioning to cope positively with the changing scenario of education i.e. shift to virtual classrooms and working from home scenarios. The adaptivity mechanism of resilience is a crucial contributor to career preparation, teaching effectiveness, and persistence in the profession.

Tweaking the present construct of resilience with strengthening of adaptivity through conscious interventions would result in psychological immunity amidst the adverse times.

A robust intervention imprinted in literature of educational psychology is that of training in mindfulness—the intentional cultivation of focused attention and awareness which boosts resilience among teachers and students. Meiklejohn & Phillips, (2012) demonstrated that cultivating mindfulness-based interventions in K-12 education adults, is associated with reduced emotional distress, anxiety, and depression; positive states of mind, teachers' sense of well-being and teaching self-efficacy, enhancing immune system function, fostering social connection and enriched interpersonal relation. On the other hand, mindfulness trainings resulted in a range of cognitive, social, and psychological benefits to both elementary and high school students. The intervention was carried through an intensive 8- week school-based mindfulness training, resulting in greatest improvement in

psychological measures of coping and well-being. The programs centred around three mindfulness-based training programs for teachers: Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) (focusing on personal and professional identity, reflective practice, holistic vision of teaching, social and emotional competence; Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) (teachers' overall wellbeing; teachers' effectiveness in providing emotional, behavioural, and instructional support to students); and Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART) in Education.

Another set of interventions are based on participatory, collaborative and emancipatory action research to build resilience. A study by Hiver, (2015) put forth that deployment of emancipatory action research promotes self-care, self-empowerment and self-efficacy within the community. At the heart of such action researches, lies the element role of Critical reflection has the power to exert influence our individual strategies for survival and empower individuals with ways to remain resilient during change.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence/ (Emotional Engagement):

Educational engagement between teachers and students is a framework of emotions. As stated by Carlson, (2020), Emotions determine and motivate what teachers and students seek, attend, perceive, and remember in terms of our education. The premise of engagement depends on the dichotomous relationship

i.e. teachers and students should be engaged simultaneous in the process of learning.

As reviewed earlier in the opening section of the paper, the sudden lockdown followed by shift to online teaching modes by teachers witnessed feelings of anxiety and stress among teachers and leads to cases of emotional exhaustion and burnout. The armor of psychological immunity averts teachers and students from such negative emotions of exhaustion, stress and burnout and fosters positive emotions even in uncertain times like these. Positive emotions represent part of hedonic components and include emotional stability, emotional control, and coherence in one's personality, boosting the emotional wellbeing of teachers and students.

The emotional well-being represents the monitoring-executing ability of psychological immunity which nurtures problem solving abilities amidst the disturbances and uncertainties in education (Norrish , Williams , Connor , & Robinson , 2013). Teachers and students associate with the problems and look for solving the problems which nurtures their emotional stability and coherence.

Further evidences in the previous literature acknowledge that interactive teaching coupled with emotional intelligence fosters educational engagement (Carlson, 2020). The robust cloud of uncertainty surrounding the online educational scenario makes it imperative to strengthen the premise of emotional engagement between the two parties for effectively coping with the transformations.

Thus, the component of emotional intelligence can flourish when there is an outlet for active interaction between teachers and students which and restore strengthen positive emotions, engagement during the scenario of social isolation and physical distancing. Thus, this necessitates development of suitable interventions in online teaching processes.

An instance of such intervention is Zoom video conference meetings which are a solution to maintaining engagement in virtual education, which promote didactic sessions and interactive conferences during the coronavirus pandemic. Research scholars put forth that emotions stimulate and motivate actions, can assist in effective decision making even in crises (Wango, Wairire, & Kimamo, 2020). Based on this popular premise, various interventions have been initiated on mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak by World Health Organization. Toquero, (2020) bespeaks about intervention based on evidence-based practices, mental health-related services, and introducing responsive curriculum responsive to the needs of the changing times such as . Cherian & Sheshadri, (2020) highlighted the importance of Information, Education and Communication materials, commonly known as IEC are vital during the times of any disaster or pandemic, The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has designated NIMHANS as the centre for preparation for IEC materials on COVID-19 -Psycho-social and Mental Health issues. Since the delivery of IEC content is not enough for emotional engagement, academicians sought out blended learning for didactic sessions between teachers and students.

Emotional engagement can be achieved through interventions based on social monitoring and mobilizing constructs of psychological immunity. Such interventions are largely based on Collaboration , reflective, interactive and critical thinking which are instrumental in achieving emotional connect between teachers and students (AVGERINOU & MOROS, 2020).

3. Figurative Analysis:

In the present section, Researchers have attempted to trace the dynamic development of Psychological Immunity Constructs along with requisite Interventions using the **Psychological Immunisation Process of Self**

Organisation (Hiver, 2015) which replicates the current psychological well-being of academic stakeholders amidst COVID-19.

STAGE OF IMMUNISATION PROCESS	PYSCHOLOGICAL FEELINGS/BEHAVIORS EXHIBITED	PYSCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS TO BE STRENGTHENED	REQUISITE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS
1. TRIGGERING	Vulnerability, Anxiety, Stress, Emotional exhaustion Burnout, Perceived threat	Emotional Stability Emotional Control and Coherence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mental Health Services 2. Meditation and Yoga 3. Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques 4. Social connectedness <p>through interactive digital platforms (ZOOM)</p>
2. COUPLING	Coping Behaviours Development of Comfort Zone (pursuing hobby, quality time with family, spirituality etc.)	Self Concept Self Identity Positive perception Perceived-supportiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sharing Virtual stories on social media 2. Open and Transparent Lines of communication among Parents/Teachers and Institutions 3. Effective Mechanism for Student Feedback and Assessment 4. Mitigation through IEC <p>Infrastructure</p>
3. REALIGNMENT	Controlling Behaviour (Controlling disturbances)	Adaptivity (for teachers and students both) Teaching effectiveness and efficacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional Development of Teachers for upskilling digital competencies 2. Trainings on Online Teaching-Learning Tools 3. Teacher Trainings based on Experiential Learning Action Research, 4. Introducing student curriculum based on Collaborative, Reflective ,Problem solving, Critical Thinking Modules 5. Faculty Development Programs and Workshops on Techniques of Blended teaching-learning
4. STABILIZATION	Future Preparedness, Solidification of New Identity as Digital Teachers	Academic Resilience, Career preparation, Persistence in the profession.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holistic Education 2. Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education 3. Emancipatory Research

Limitations of present study and scope for further research

The present research has been set in the backdrop of ongoing pandemic amidst the disruption of educational processes. The researchers have based their findings on the scantily available data signifying the impact of COVID-19 on educational environments. But the long term consequences are yet to be explored and quantified for further investigation in the field of positive psychology in education. The current study magnifies the need to revisit the existing constructs of immunity and adjust them to tackle the uncertainties and respond to changing demand of online teaching. Further quantitative investigation of the constructs would bring promising results in improving the well-being of teachers and students. Since the study of human psychology is vast and complex, the constructs of Psychological immunity are sometimes overlapping. The techniques of Interventions discussed at each stage of immunisation process can be applied to other stages to fit the diverse contours of human emotions.

Scope for further research:

1. The researchers offer enriching insights for educational institutions to base their teaching and learning interventions and future teacher trainings on discussed psychological immunity constructs in the field of emotional engagement, digital well-being, self-reflection and adaptivity of teachers and students.
2. The present research studies psychological immunity in generic academic context. Thus, there is an ample scope for research scholars to explore how constructs of psychological immunity are influenced with a particular cohort of academic community i.e. school teachers, higher education faculty, students and young graduates.

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