

Cultivating the Professional Resilience in University Academics During the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines professional resilience among university academics during the COVID-19 pandemic by utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of interviews conducted with a diverse group of university academics in EduCity Iskandar, Malaysia. In the academic landscape, resilience holds immense importance, particularly during disruptive events like the global pandemic. While previous research has broadly explored resilience, this study focuses specifically on the under-researched profession-related dimension of higher education. The methodology employed semi-structured interviews guided by IPA principles, involving ten university academics, to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively, revealing three central themes in their narratives. The results highlight the essential aspects of professional resilience among university academics in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, participants exhibited an unwavering commitment to their work and students, driven by a profound sense of responsibility. Second, they displayed adept problem-solving skills and sought innovative solutions to navigate challenges. Third, creativity played a pivotal role as university academics harnessed technology to enhance teaching methods and engage students effectively. These findings propose that higher education institutions should prioritise supporting their academic staff through professional development programs that emphasise commitment towards students, problem-solving and technology integration. Encouraging mentorship and promoting collaboration can further enhance the resilience of the academic community. Future research could explore the impact of interventions based on the identified themes and delve into students' experiences during the pandemic, offering a holistic perspective on resilience in higher education. In conclusion, this research underscores the enduring relevance of resilience in higher education, extending its significance beyond exceptional circumstances to the routine challenges faced by university academics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, interpretative phenomenological analysis, resilience, profession-related, university academics

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INTRODUCTION

Resilience is crucial in higher education, especially when confronting extraordinary challenges such as the global COVID-19 pandemic. This study embarks on a thorough exploration of resilience among university academics, recognising that while the pandemic serves as a significant context, the challenges in higher education encompass

a broad spectrum. The primary objective is to shed light on how university academics' commitment to their professional responsibilities empowers them to navigate challenges during the pandemic.

Mansfield et al. (2012) and Helker et al. (2018) have contributed significantly to the discourse on resilience. Mansfield's framework offers a comprehensive perspective that broadly applies to educators, whereas Helker's work focuses specifically on university academics. Nonetheless, a noticeable gap exists within the current literature, where most studies on resilience among educators adopt a broad and generalised approach, often neglecting nuanced profession-related issues (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). Hence, this study seeks to bridge this gap by conducting a focused examination of the specific professional challenges encountered by university academics within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This inquiry acknowledges that resilience within academia extends well beyond crisis management and is an integral aspect of university academics' daily professional lives. Understanding how they adapt and exhibit resilience provides valuable insights applicable not only during crises but also in addressing routine academic challenges. The ability to uphold high-quality teaching, foster student engagement and advance the broader academic mission significantly hinges on university academics' professional resilience (Helker et al., 2018; Day, 2019). Therefore, this research aims to show that resilience remains important in higher education.

This study extends its scope beyond pandemic-induced challenges, aiming to offer insights and strategies that benefit university academics in the face of a diverse array of challenges that persist in higher education. The capacity to navigate an ever-evolving academic landscape is a pivotal skill for educators, and this research aims to equip educators with a versatile toolkit for effective adaptation and problem-solving.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced unparalleled challenges across various sectors of society, and higher education is no exception. Within this context, resilience, as a concept, encompasses multiple dimensions, including personal, emotional, social and professional aspects. Mansfield et al. (2012) provided a comprehensive resilience framework applicable to teachers in general, while Helker et al. (2018) specifically tailored their framework to address the unique context of university academics. Together, these frameworks highlight the multidimensional nature of resilience and underscore its complexity as a phenomenon, particularly in higher education. While resilience is multifaceted, this study places particular emphasis on the profession-related dimension due to its enduring significance in the context of higher education, recognising that challenges can arise from various sources and are not limited to the pandemic alone. In higher education, university academics face an array of challenges that extend beyond pandemics, including evolving pedagogical approaches (Bonk et al., 2020), shifting student demographics (Johnson, 2019), technological advancements (Verdin-Zea et al., 2020) and changes in institutional policies (Verdin-Zea et al., 2020). These challenges have been present before the pandemic and persist in the post-pandemic era.

Despite the increasing interest in resilience within the academic context, a noticeable gap remains in the literature (Ang et al., 2021). Few studies have delved deeply into the profession-related dimension of resilience, especially concerning university academics during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sharin, 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the specific professional challenges and adaptive strategies employed by university academics during these challenging circumstances.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and understand the key elements in the profession-related dimension of resilience amidst the challenges posed by COVID-19 among university academics. It aims to uncover the ways in which commitment to professional responsibilities strengthens resilience, allowing them to navigate challenges during the pandemic.

To achieve this objective, this research seeks to answer critical questions. First, it delves into the core components of professional resilience exhibited by university academics amid the pandemic's disruptions. In doing so, it will unveil the factors and qualities that contribute to the university academics' ability to adapt and persevere in their professional roles during these challenging times. Second, the study investigates how university academics demonstrate their commitment to their work and students amidst the pandemic and the profound impact this commitment has on their overall resilience. This exploration aims to provide actionable insights and inform strategies to support university academics as they navigate the challenges of higher education. It is important to acknowledge that other dimensions of resilience, such as personal, emotional and social, may also play significant roles in university academics' experiences.

METHOD

EduCity Iskandar in Johor, Malaysia is a well-suited research site for studying university academics' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This integrated learning hub, housing several higher education institutions, aligns with Malaysia's broader goal of becoming a regional centre for higher education (The Edge, 2011). Its strategic location near Singapore and Kuala Lumpur ensures a substantial pool of potential students, making it a prime setting for exploring university academics' challenges and resilience. However, the site faces unique issues such as attracting and retaining academic staff because of its proximity to Singapore, which offers a more favourable currency exchange rate (Wan & Weerasena, 2018). This particular challenge, combined with the rapid growth of Iskandar Puteri, Johor, underscores the need to understand how university academics adapt and thrive in such an environment. This context makes EduCity Iskandar an ideal location for examining the resilience resources of university academics, especially in light of the uncertainties and risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have had a significant impact on their livelihoods and psychological well-being.

Moreover, the status of EduCity as an Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) Entry Point Project (EPP) underlines its strategic importance for Malaysia's educational and economic objectives. The projected contributions to Gross National Income and job creation further emphasise the significance of this site (The Edge, 2011). By conducting research in this unique educational ecosystem, researchers can gain valuable insights into the resilience strategies employed by university academics facing multifaceted challenges in a rapidly evolving and globally competitive higher education landscape (Wan & Weerasena, 2018). Consequently, EduCity Iskandar offers an ideal research setting to explore and understand how university academics coped with the adversities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic within the broader context of their professional lives.

For this study, participants were intentionally selected from among academic staff working within the educational institutions at EduCity Iskandar. A diverse cohort of ten university academics, varying in age, teaching experience, roles, marital status, and job scope, was carefully chosen. This deliberate selection enabled an in-depth exploration of their lived experiences and provided insights into the COVID-19 outbreak. In line with the approach outlined by Smith and Flowers (2009), the research design employed in this study is interpretative phenomenology, and the choice of these academics within EduCity Iskandar as participants offers a unique opportunity to understand how they have personally encountered and cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Study Participants

| Participant | Gender | Age | Years of Teaching Experience | Role / Duty in University | Marital Status |
|-------------|--------|-----|------------------------------|--|----------------|
| UA1 | F | 38 | 8 | Lecturer / Subject Lead | Married |
| UA2 | F | 40 | 12 | Lecturer / Subject Lead | Married |
| UA3 | M | 44 | 15 | Lecturer / Subject Lead | Single |
| UA4 | F | 47 | 20 | Senior Lecturer / Subject Lead | Single |
| UA5 | F | 52 | 23 | Associate Professor / Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs | Married |
| UA6 | M | 54 | 25 | Associate Professor / Subject Lead | Married |
| UA7 | M | 51 | 22 | Senior Lecturer / Subject Lead | Single |
| UA8 | M | 37 | 8 | Assistant Professor / Team Lead | Single |
| UA9 | M | 55 | 28 | Associate Professor / Head of Foundation | Married |
| UA10 | F | 54 | 26 | Associate Professor / Dean of Student Affairs | Single |

Note: The code UA# denotes the participant number for individuals who are university academics.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Management Group (RMG) of Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMed) prior to its commencement. To protect the privacy of the human subjects involved, their identities could only be determined through a coding system. Data collected from interviews was securely encrypted using a code (referred to as 'UA#') to maintain its anonymity. To protect participants' well-being, university academics were given the option to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences.

Data Collection

Following the recommendations of Smith and Osborn (2008), the researcher employed semi-structured interviews to encourage informal and adaptable conversations, allowing researchers to delve into their "lived experiences". Open-ended, non-leading questions were posed to closely capture participants' perspectives, with detailed notes taken after each interview to record their initial thoughts, emotions, and impressions (Gibbs, 2013). Due to COVID-19 safety protocols, interviews were conducted over Zoom, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, and

were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure complete understanding and consent, a study framework information sheet was provided to university academics before their participation. Informed consent emphasising privacy and confidentiality was thoroughly explained, and participants were encouraged to withdraw if they felt uncomfortable or threatened.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) involves multiple stages. Accordingly, IPA has been used to 'theme' and interpret interview transcripts by adopting Smith and Osborn's (2008) approach which respects the structure of data. An iterative process of reading and listening to each transcript of the interview was engaged, during which notes and memos were made in the left-hand margins of the transcript to record anything interesting or significant. The notes and memos constituted a summary of the content as well as comments or connections, similarities, differences, contradictions and preliminary interpretations. The transcripts were then re-read, and the right-hand margins were used to document emerging themes. This involved moving to a higher interpretative level of abstraction, general enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases, while remaining grounded in what the participant said (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This process was repeated for all interviews, with each interview in its own light as separate and individual from the other interviews.

According to IPA, the interview transcript was reviewed exploratively and comments were noted while reading the transcripts. Consequently, line-by-line reading enables the identification of important codes. Later, the researcher read the interviews for a second time to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants, which was specific to the objective of this study. During the reading, the researcher combined all comments and notes and identified emergent themes.

Although commonalities in themes were noticed, all issues were identified in each transcript as they emerged; thus the researcher focused on ways in which accounts from participants were similar or different (Smith & Osborn, 2008). When all interviews were analysed and superordinate themes and theme clusters were identified, a master list of themes and sub-themes was created. This provided a coherent framework for understanding the significance that the participants attributed to their teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The themes and sub-themes master list was translated into a narrative account to understand the content and complexity of the participant's meanings rather than measuring their frequency. This involves the researcher engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. Care was taken to ensure that a distinction was made between what the participants said and the researcher's interpretations.

RESULTS

In this study, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was employed to comprehend the data derived from interviews conducted with university academics in EduCity Iskandar during the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data analysis indicated that university academics developed resilience, particularly when confronted with challenges from the pandemic. This was notably evident during the widespread implementation of online distance learning during the lockdown. Their adaptation to the educational disruption caused by the pandemic and their commitment to their professional responsibilities in education were evident, aligning with Mansfield et al.'s (2012) and Helker et al.'s (2018) resilience framework.

Main Theme 1: Adapting to Challenges

Within the overarching theme of "Adapting to Challenges", the sub-theme of "Quick Adaptation" highlighted the participants' remarkable ability to respond swiftly to unforeseen circumstances. This involved recognising the need to find alternative approaches when faced with challenges (Participant UA4). Furthermore, the narratives revealed that in response to the pandemic, educators quickly acquired new skills, enabling them to engage in online teaching, digital content creation and other activities, even if they were initially technophobic (Participant UA9). These insights highlight the university academics' adaptability when confronted with unprecedented challenges.

Within the sub-theme of "Resourceful Problem Solving", educators have employed innovative strategies to facilitate effective learning in the emerging digital landscape. One of the participants described his new strategy to boost student engagement during the transition to online learning mode:

"When videos are created, they are cut into smaller segments, focusing on specific topics. After the video, quizzes and tests are given. That's how tutorials are structured." (Participant UA6)

Additionally, the narratives recounted the early stages of the lockdown, which was marked by a sudden shift from face-to-face to online education. Despite encountering obstacles such as cyber-attacks, educators displayed resourcefulness by exploring different ways to adapt during the pandemic, although it was difficult for them:

“The first few months of lockdown, transition from face to face to online. It wasn't helpful that we had a cyber-attack. We started from scratch. Learning new technologies. Features of Zoom. Other platforms, Microsoft teams. So much stuff available. It was hard. We need to be trained on that.” (Participant UA6)

Turning to the theme of "Mental Resilience", participants shared insights into the psychological aspects of resilience. One participant emphasised the importance of self-reflection and addressing mental tension as a means of enhancing personal resilience in coping with stress and emotional challenges (Participant UA2). Another participant advised through experience that to build more mental flexibility, he keeps “trying new things”:

“You need to try new things in order to let your life feel a bit more exciting rather than confining yourself into the things you are so used to.” (Participant UA6)

These narratives highlight the pivotal role of mental resilience in university academics' overall well-being.

Main Theme 2: Commitment to Education

Under the theme of "Commitment to Education", three sub-themes emerged. The sub-theme of "Student Focus" emphasised their responsibility to provide unwavering support to their students when one participant said, *“They rely on us, and we will do what can be done.”* (Participant UA2). Aligning with the same theme, another participant expressed her dedication to impart knowledge with a single focus saying that, *“I just want them to learn”*:

“I want them to learn. That's all. I am thinking of ways that I can impart knowledge. I don't know. I just want them to learn.” (Participant UA4)

Furthermore, several university academics opted to maintain a physical presence on campus, as Participant UA9 articulated, although they had the option to work from home;

“If students are here, it's even more important”

The sub-theme of "Professional Dedication" highlighted the university academics' passion for teaching and their unwavering commitment to their professional goals when a participant said,

“It's my passion that I want to keep teaching my students. My goal is to teach student. I need to keep working towards my goal. We try our level best.” (Participant UA1).

Participants reiterated the importance of collaboration and mutual support among professionals in navigating the challenges of the pandemic as exemplified by Participant A2's statement:

“We need each other to get through this pandemic. The goal is for us, professional we are expected to deliver.”

Furthermore, the educators emphasised the symbolic significance of being physically present on campus, reinforcing their dedication to their roles as stated by Participant UA9:

“Well, despite us being allowed to work from home, I am here in the university campus, partly for personal reasons, because I am more comfortable working here, it's a symbolic thing. People know that I will be here. They know that I will be available, I can tell them what's going on here. That's important.” (Participant UA9)

Finally, under the theme of "Resilience Impact", participants emphasised the broader implications of resilience beyond individual coping strategies. Resilience was described as the ability to adapt to change while considering the needs of others and being able to "play in the game":

"Resilience is being able to cope and adapt to the changes. It's not enough that you are doing it for your own. You have to consider others too. If you plan something, you think it's the best way, but you have to think about your team mates too. If you are really resilient you should be able to consider your team mates' issues and adjust too. Everyone should be able to "play in the game"." (Participant UA2)

The narratives stressed the importance of compassion and empathy, particularly during stressful times, as crucial elements that influence team motivation and cohesion, which contribute to resilience:

"Just go to the basics of being compassionate. To your colleagues. To your staff. All of us are stressed with what's going on. It will go a long way being kind. You might not realise it but what you say even it doesn't affect others, but it might affect others in a big way. The way we speak, we write. Not just for management. For everybody. Just more compassion. More empathy. This influences the motivation of the team." (Participant UA10)

The findings of this study are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Themes, Sub-Themes, and Sample Quotes Extracted from University Academics' Responses

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Sample Quotes |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Adapting to Challenges | Quick Adaptation | "Alternatives must always be found." (UA4) "Through this pandemic I can positively say that we have learnt new skills. Everybody, including those technophobic is now talking and teaching online, uploading, downloading, making videos because they have to." (UA9) |
| | Resourceful Problem Solving | "When videos are created, they are cut into smaller segments, focusing on specific topics. After the video, quizzes and tests are given. That's how tutorials are structured." (UA6) "The first few months of lockdown, transition from face to face to online... So much stuff available. It was hard. We need to be trained on that." (UA6) |
| | Mental Resilience | "If there are mental tensions, we must start with ourselves first, do some reflections." (UA2) "You need to try new things in order to let your life feel a bit more exciting rather than confining yourself into the things you are so used to." (UA6) |
| Commitment to Education | Student Focus | "They rely on us, and we will do what can be done." (UA2) "I want them to learn. That's all. I am thinking of ways that I can impart knowledge. I don't know. I just want them to learn." (UA4) "If students are here, it's even more important." (UA9) |
| | Professional Dedication | "It's my passion that I want to keep teaching my students. My goal is to teach student. I need to keep working towards my goal. We try our level best." (UA1) "We need each other to get through this pandemic. The goal is for us, professional we are expected to deliver." (UA2) "Well, despite us being allowed to work from home, I am here in the university campus... it's a symbolic thing. People know that I will be here. They know that I will be available... That's important." (UA9) |
| | Resilience Impact | "Resilience is being able to cope and adapt to the changes. ... If you are really resilient you should be able to consider your team mates' issues and adjust too. Everyone should be able to "play in the game". (UA2) "Just go to the basics of being compassionate. ...This influences the motivation of the team." (UA10) |

Note: UA# represents University Academic Participant Number #.

DISCUSSION

Resilience is essential for university academics, especially when facing unprecedented challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This research, guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), explored how university academics showed resilience during the pandemic. By connecting their experiences to established resilience frameworks (Mansfield et al., 2012; Helker et al., 2018), this study gained insight into the factors that helped them adapt and thrive in their roles during these challenging times. This study also examined how university academics' commitment to education and students shapes their overall professional resilience, which has significant implications for educators and institutions (Helker et al., 2018).

Recognising university academics who have quickly adapted to unforeseen challenges highlights the significance of adaptability in resilient individuals. This aligns closely with Mansfield et al.'s (2012) finding that resilience extends beyond mere survival to the identification of alternative approaches when faced with adversity. This becomes even more significant when individuals who initially considered themselves technophobic successfully navigate the digital landscape. It signifies not only adaptability, but also a deep commitment to effective education. Even with fear and technological anxieties, these educators bravely embrace technology to fulfil their commitment to their profession and their students, aligning with a study conducted by Joseph and Thomas (2022).

Amid the pandemic, as the transition to full online learning became necessary, innovative teaching strategies emerged as ideal examples of the creative approaches educators have adopted to navigate the complexity of digital technology in education. These strategies include redesigning lessons into manageable segments, and educators writing new quizzes and tests according to the learning objectives and milestones. The process of redesigning lessons involved putting in extra hours to rework their existing teaching materials and uploading newly designed materials into universities' learning management systems. This not only demonstrates resourcefulness but also the commitment to delivering high-quality educational experience by enhancing student engagement, as suggested by Ong and Quek (2023).

The university academics' emphasis on self-reflection and addressing mental tension highlights the pivotal role of mental resilience in their lives. However, this introspection and self-care are not self-indulgent; rather, they indicate educators' commitment to their well-being, ensuring that they remain at their best to fulfil their professional duties. Findings have shown a strong connection between flexibility and resilience, where educators willingly explore new strategies to adapt, thrive and remain resilient, even during educational disruptions and uncertainties. This aligns with Koole et al.'s (2015) study, which suggests that resilience is more about flexibility than staying positive.

Throughout this study, university academics consistently expressed their dedication to their students and their future beyond the pandemic. They are determined to enhance their students' learning experiences, even during disruptions that may lead to demotivation among students and educators. The educators' commitment to their students transcends job requirements and becomes a commitment to their profession. During the pandemic, their focus remained on their students' learning experiences, which motivated them to persevere. Even when they could work from home, some chose to be present in their workplace as a symbolic gesture, signifying their continued accessibility to students. This commitment reflects a profound sense of duty and purpose, extending far beyond the challenges of the pandemic.

Throughout the university academics' narrative, the concept of resilience emerges as a collective effort, not an individual one. It is the ability to adapt while considering the well-being of other individuals (Fullerton et al., 2021). This emphasises the vital role of teamwork, empathy and mutual support in nurturing resilience, particularly within the academic setting, as highlighted by Permatasari et al., (2021).

In conclusion, this study uncovers the key elements of resilience that allow university academics to adapt to challenging times. Their commitment to work and students significantly influenced their overall profession-related resilience. This combination of adaptability and dedication empowers academics to effectively navigate disruptions and thrive in their profession, as evidenced by Mansfield et al., (2012) and Helker et al., (2018). This study provides valuable insights into the resilience strategies employed by academics in facing the pandemic's unique challenges while ensuring the quality of education and their professional roles.

Limitations of the Study

It is imperative to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, the research focused on a specific context—university academics during the COVID-19 pandemic in EduCity Iskandar, which potentially limits the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could broaden this scope by considering diverse educational settings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of resilience across various contexts. Second, the study relied primarily on the self-reported experiences and perceptions of the participants. While valuable, these subjective data may introduce biases and limitations. Future research could complement these insights using observational data and objective measures to offer a more holistic view of educators' resilience.

Implications of the Study

The implications drawn from this study offer valuable insights for higher education institutions aiming to support their university academics effectively. First, it is imperative to prioritise the enhancement of professional development opportunities for educators. The findings highlight that resilience is not an innate trait, but a skill that can be cultivated (Lyons & Schatzberg, 2020). Therefore, institutions should consider incorporating targeted resilience-building programmes into their professional development programmes. These initiatives can encompass training sessions, workshops or readily accessible resources designed to equip educators with the tools and strategies necessary to navigate challenges effectively.

Second, this study underscores the importance of providing comprehensive support to educators, especially during times of crisis. Commitment to professional responsibilities emerged as a crucial element of resilience. Given this, educational institutions should be prepared to offer additional support and resources when unexpected disruptions occur, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This support may encompass psychological assistance, technological resources and flexible work arrangements to ensure educators maintain their commitment to their roles without undue stress.

Moreover, this study emphasises the necessity of adapting teaching practices to meet the evolving needs of students and the academic landscape. Universities should actively encourage and facilitate innovative teaching methods and provide necessary resources for educators to experiment with new approaches. This adaptability not only enhances the learning experience for students but also equips educators with the skills to overcome challenges effectively.

Furthermore, resilience is not confined to crisis management, but is a relevant and enduring aspect of educators' daily professional lives. It is imperative for higher education institutions to recognise that challenges can emerge from various sources, not just during crises. Therefore, they should proactively prepare educators to navigate a dynamic academic landscape through ongoing training and support.

Additionally, institutions and policymakers should consider the development and implementation of comprehensive resilience frameworks tailored to the unique context of university academics. These frameworks should encompass various dimensions of resilience, including the profession-related dimension, to provide a holistic approach to resilience building.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of continued research on resilience within the academic community. While this research focuses on the profession-related dimension, it is essential to explore other dimensions of resilience, such as personal, emotional and social, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how educators navigate challenges and thrive in their roles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this research explored the profession-related dimension of resilience displayed by university academics amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an in-depth examination of educators' experiences and narratives, two significant themes emerged: Adapting to challenges and commitment to education. These findings emphasise the importance of resilience in higher education, showing its relevance not only in exceptional circumstances but also in the everyday challenges faced by educators.

Building on these insights, recommendations are proposed to enhance the resilience of university academics. First, educational institutions should consider designing tailored professional development programs that focus on building resilience. These programs should encompass modules dedicated to enhancing commitment, problem-solving skills, and innovative technological integration in education. Fostering a culture of mentorship and collaboration among educators can be instrumental in sharing the best practices and problem-solving strategies. Creating platforms for mentorship and knowledge exchange can significantly contribute to the resilience and adaptability of the academic staff.

Institutions should prioritise comprehensive training for educators to effectively utilise technology in their teaching methods. Specialised workshops and access to educational technology resources can empower educators to employ innovative approaches to enhance student engagement, and consequently, resilience.

Future investigations could explore the impact of interventions tailored based on the identified themes to understand how educational institutions can effectively foster resilience among university academics. Additionally, further research should delve into the experiences of students during the pandemic, providing a complementary perspective to our understanding of resilience within the academic ecosystem as a whole.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing future research avenues, the academic community can continue to advance the understanding of resilience in higher education and develop strategies to empower educators to thrive in the dynamic academic landscape.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

The authors declare that the presented work is original, not previously published, or submitted elsewhere. The data and information in this document are results of the authors' research and analysis. All contributors and sources of funding are duly acknowledged. Moreover, the ethical guidelines set by the institutional review board have been adhered to, and there are no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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NOTE:

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