

Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge at a University in South Africa

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Abstract

According to UNESCO, 9.8 million African students are experiencing a disruption in their studies due to the closure of higher education institutions. The danger of contamination from the coronavirus has forced institutions to move their courses online. However, a transition to an online mode is complicated on a continent where only 24% of the population has access to the internet. This study reports on the University of KwaZulu-Natal's response to the impact of COVID-19. This constituted extensive planning among all stakeholders at the university, in ensuring that students and staff are well equipped to confront the pandemic. This paper aims to highlight how the university has responded to the institutional closure and how it has protected its integrity in ensuring that teaching and learning is not compromised. For the purposes of this paper, only data sourced from lecturers will be discussed. In a bid to save as much of the 2020 first semester as possible, the University management required academics to put their content on-line, to be accessed by students. This also required academics reviewing module content, approaches to teaching, modes of delivery, and assessment strategies. By way of

illustration, in order to present a class lecture, lecturers have undergone several training and workshop sessions on remote teaching, for example, Zoom live teaching as a replacement for traditional classroom teaching. This paper aims to focus on the School of Education, and reports on its programmes. Collection of data was impacted by the lockdown and legal requirements of social distancing. Consequently, interviews through the Zoom App were conducted with eight lecturers located in the Languages and Arts Cluster, within the School of Education. Document analysis was also used to establish what plans and programmes were in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amongst findings, it is evident that the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) has taken proactive measures in ensuring that teaching and learning continue and every lecturer has access to resources for remote teaching and learning. Whilst cognisant of the fact that the University is still in its infant stage of remote teaching and learning, the study indicates that staff are responding positively to these changes and that despite the pandemic, moral remains high.

Keywords: COVID-19, remote teaching, online assessment, staff training, lockdown regulations, teaching and learning.

1 Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic has severely disrupted almost every aspect of normal life. A dramatic increase in unemployment, unprecedented stress on household incomes, alarming reports of infection and death as well as restrictions on movement in the lockdown have collectively posed an unprecedented challenge to universities. Whilst struggling with mitigating the costs of free education for most students, lack of suitable infrastructure, decolonising the curricula and concerted efforts to transform the educational landscape, universities are now faced with a pandemic that has forced the closure of all campuses and heralded the switch from traditional to online learning. This sudden, forced migration to virtual teaching has presented new challenges. This study explores lecturer perceptions of how the University of KwaZulu-Natal mediated these challenges.

2 Literature Review

As the world faces the scourge of the COVID 19, higher education institutions

have had to respond quickly and decisively (Huang *et al.* 2020). According to Bao (2020) when the epidemic hit China, universities were forced to move teaching and learning online. The Chinese Ministry of Education took the lead in the migration to online learning initiative and entitled it ‘Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning’ (Huang *et al.* 2020). This title is apt for the situation in which UKZN finds itself in trying to save the academic year 2020.

As in China, UKZN has reacted by shifting teaching and learning on to online platforms. This took the form of emergency remote teaching (ERT). Hodges *et al.* (2020) describe ERT as a temporary solution to education that replaces face-to-face delivery. They opine that:

the primary objective in these circumstances is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis (Hodges *et al.* 2020: 6).

ERT is an immediate response to the impact of COVID-19 on UKZN’s delivery of teaching and learning. The main challenges UKZN has faced are anxieties brought on by the digital divide and existing social inequalities (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2010). Whilst UKZN has free WIFI and many computer labs, many students lack resources. Furthermore, many are not computer literate. UKZN therefore acted decisively by putting measures in place and moved to learning online, provided staff support which includes training, counselling and research opportunities. WIFI routers and data and laptops were arranged for first year students.

These are contingency plans, as Minister Nzimande puts it in his Ministerial briefing on 30 April 2020 where he stated, ‘There is no full online education, it is just for support’ (Nzimande 2020). At the same time, ‘No student must be left behind’.

Mineo (2020) points out that:

Generally speaking, the most economically challenged in our society will be the most vulnerable in this crisis, and the most advantaged are most likely to survive it without losing too much ground ... Twenty-first century learning absolutely requires technology and internet. We can’t leave this to chance or the accident of birth.

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This insight signals where UKZN should be directing its resources and expertise. Given the pandemic, online personal testimony in University newsletters was also used to provide insight.

Finding ways to grade students who lack access to Wi-Fi or are overwhelmed by conditions at home has posed a challenge at many education institutions. The inequities have initiated a conversation about assessment. Educators have been forced to innovate and revised syllabi and extend deadlines as remedial measures (Simonetti 2020).

Art History Professor, Charlene Villaseñor Black at UCLA, wanted to assure to students unsettled by the pandemic:

I want students to have an awareness that we have been here before and an awareness of how the arts can provide sustenance, respite, and hope for us. This is the moment to really think about how the humanities and the arts make us more human (Migdol 2020).

Christina Wyman (2020: 1), in *Inside HigherEd*, commented:

Like educators across the country, my plan for the second half of the semester came to a screeching halt in March and left me dealing with unforeseen issues. Should I demand synchronous meetings or to give students the space and time to navigate our content independently? Which parts of the curriculum now seem superfluous under the circumstances? To what extent should I incorporate technology that I would not have otherwise used? How can I maintain at least some course integrity while remaining realistic about the pandemic's impact on my – and their – responsibilities?

The pandemic has also taxed teachers' wellbeing and emotional state. Ferguson (2020), in the *Calgary Herald* reports that after three months of remote learning, teachers are exhausted, isolated and concerned about safety protocols. According to the survey, which collected responses from 8 100 teachers, up to 70 per cent are feeling exhausted and disconnected from students, with some losing sleep over learning struggles and some students' inability to adapt to remote learning (Ferguson 2020).

According to Professor Benjamin Ola Akande, African universities could become more creative in changing 'what we do and how we do it, as we

prepare for the future, post-COVID-19'. Those successful in pivoting towards pandemic-related challenges and those willing to revert to pre-pandemic behaviour:

I believe the institutions that welcome this opportunity to introspect intentionally will become much stronger; their education process will become much more effective. Those who will revert to the way they were doing things before will be embracing irrelevance (Green 2020).

The faculty at the National University of Singapore successfully created an engaging virtual course for students. The team devised a three-pronged approach. The first was to strengthen student-teacher interaction to create a social connection. While students are waiting for class to start, they use the chat function to ask them how they were doing. During the first session, they oriented them to the course structure and requirements. This initial connection made them feel more comfortable with using this channel to offer questions and comments during the class. Also, they reminded students to turn on their videos. This makes them more responsible for paying attention and to avoid succumbing to other distractions associated with learning from home (Fung 2020).

Finally, a review of the pandemic and its implications for higher education suggests that a focused study in the School of Education at UKZN, in respect of remote teaching and learning as a reaction to the pandemic, has not been addressed expansively. This gap therefore serves as a warrant for this study. The study adds to our understanding of UKZN's efforts to mitigate the deleterious effects of the pandemic on teaching and learning, as well as unintentional opportunities that it may present.

3 Theoretical Framework

The article adopts a holistic e-Learning systems theoretical framework as proposed by Apacirio, Bacao & Oliveria (2016), which is framed within three core components, people, technology and service. These components are crucial when examining e-Learning systems as they provide 'stakeholder groups' and their interaction with e-Learning systems; the technologies which enable interaction of the different users and support to integrate content,

enable communication and collaboration tools; e-Learning services integrate all the activities corresponding to pedagogical models and to instructional strategies (Aparicio, Bacao & Oliveira 2016). Within this theoretical framework, the authors want to demonstrate how the University of KwaZulu-Natal has responded to the institutional closure due to COVID-19 lockdown regulations and how it prepared its academic staff to embark on e-Learning.

This theoretical framework is apt for our research as we want to investigate how the University has readied itself in ensuring that the academic year is saved, while also complying with lockdown restrictions. This includes getting staff ready to teach and assess via online tools, and also programmes initiated for the purpose of confronting the virus. As authors, we will use this lens to understand academics' perceptions on how they view the success or failure of the University in confronting the corona virus.

4 Methodology

We used a qualitative study approach in this research. Polinghorne (1989, cited in Maree 2016: 53) avers that qualitative research relies on words rather than numerical data, and employs meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis. Furthermore, qualitative research is naturalistic, meaning that it focuses on natural settings where interaction occurs in its natural setting. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) affirm that human beings construct their own meanings about situations, and that meaning arises out of social situations and is handled through interpretive processes. With this, the purpose of adopting qualitative approach in the research was to acquire authentic data from the participants, in which they articulated their own statements regarding their readiness towards remote teaching during the time of COVID-19 lockdown, and also, what they viewed as challenges and prospects. Therefore, data of this nature was obtained and analysed through statements and not statistics.

The study also operated under the interpretivist paradigm. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2016), for interpretivists, the purpose of education research is to understand the meaning which informs human behaviour. This is due to the reason that interpretivists believe that there is no single reality or truth about the social world, but rather a set of realities or truths which are historical, local, specific, and non-generalizable (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Therefore, research results are not out there, waiting to be picked up by

the researcher, but they are generated by the researcher, through interpretation (Guba & Lincoln 1994). This paradigm was chosen because as researchers in this study, we wanted to make interpretations based on the interviews presented by the participants, with the purpose of understanding how they felt they had readied themselves to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, and what they considered as the challenges and successes according to their perceptions.

A case study research design was used in the study. The choice of the case study research design in the current study is influenced by Cohen *et al.*'s (2011: 289) observation that the approach provides a unique example of a phenomenon in a real situation, enabling people to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles. We conducted telephone interviews with eight members of staff, as well as discussions through zoom. These lecturers participated voluntarily in the study. Six of the members were from the isiZulu Discipline, whilst two were from the English Discipline.

Due to lockdown restrictions it was impossible for us to conduct semi-structured interviews. The participants comprised both contract and permanent lecturers in the Languages and Arts Cluster (in the School of Education). We also used document analysis as a data gathering technique. Nieuwenhuis (in Maree 2016: 88), states:

When you use documents (textual data) as a data gathering technique, you focus on all types of written communications that may shed light on the phenomenon investigated. Such data sources may include published and unpublished documents, company reports, memoranda, agendas, administrative documents, letters, reports, newspaper articles, email messages, or any document that is connected to the investigation.

We collected documents that would shed light on the University preparedness on confronting the pandemic. These included University reports, programmes designed to confront the pandemic, and e-mail communication from the University Leadership. All these became useful during document analysis, which was used to ascertain what plans and programmes were in place to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on teaching and learning.

Ethical issues included obtaining informed consent from participants, explanation regarding their rights to participation, and the issue of confiden-

tiality. To preserve confidentiality, pseudonyms were used. The purpose and aims of the study were explained to all participants.

Reliability and validity protocols were also followed. The aim was to determine whether the data collected and the conclusions arrived at were consonant between researchers and participants. Member checking was implemented via e-mail and Zoom technology, by discussing the draft report with participants to ascertain the accuracy of their input. The researchers are mindful of pre-existing bias that may arise from researching their own institution and in particular, their own department. Cohen *et al.* (2011) state that in order to achieve greater validity, researchers need to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible. For this reason, peer debriefing was used to enhance the validity of the research. Finally, an external auditor was asked to review the entire process of research so that an objective assessment may be arrived at.

5 Findings and Discussion

UKZN has confronted the pandemic in multiple way. One of the measures has been moving to online teaching, which is something new to many staff. It was for this reason that the University provided staff with data packages for them to be able to work from home. Some data discussed here were gathered through telephone interviews, zoom discussions with staff, and also document analysis. The following is a discussion on what the participating lecturers perceive as strides taken by the University to prepare for online teaching, in relation to staff:

5.1 Provision of off-Campus Wi-Fi Access for Staff

The University has made it a priority to provide each staff member with data packages, for the access of Wi-Fi, while working remotely, in response to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, which among others, encourage ‘social distancing’ and ‘stay at home’. Strictly adhering to the lockdown regulations, all staff members were considered for such support. This is evident in the extract below:

.... We are talking about the staff members in your Clusters listed in the attached document that received the packages during the second

tranche distribution. Their details together with the details of their packages are now needed in the template provided (email from Mandla*, 6 May 2020).

This shows that staff were provided with data packages, as a fundamental commitment by the University to ensure its staff would be able to work from home.

5.2 Teaching Plans

All the participating lecturers pointed out that the University had plans in place to ensure that teaching and learning continues. These included training of staff on using various teaching strategies suitable for online learning, online assessment training, distant supervision of PhD research, and so forth. For example, the *UKZN Principles of the Teaching and Learning Project Plan during the COVID-19-related Restrictions for Students and for Academic Staff Document* (2020) states that:

As we approach the official launch of the UKZN remote teaching and learning mode, it is important that we reflect on it closely after the dry-run: what we shall do, how we shall do it, who will provide guidance for the good practices enshrined in the plan, and importantly, how we shall collect the monitoring and evaluation data that will be used to determine how well we are faring in our novel venture. It is important that we learn from initial practices soon in order to improve our system, going forward (UKZN 2020: 2).

This attests to the forward thinking and planning initiated by the University. The dry run exposed operational shortcomings and the University was quick to provide support in this regard. To many staff members, engagement with Zoom was a novel experience that had to be mastered with practice. Attending the tutorial workshops and enlisting the help of support structures, enabled staff to successfully manage online teaching.

5.2.1 Revision of Module Outlines

Numerous staff communication documents, for example, emails from the Uni-

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University Leadership to staff, are evidence that revisions were made by the University staff to ensure consonance with online teaching. Lecturers had to revise module templates for all modules to suit the online teaching requirements. Such revisions included revising module content, teaching strategies, nature of activities, and assessment strategies. Some staff found this very challenging as they had to decide on outcomes, content and assessment to omit. This is evident in Zizile's comment below:

When one designs outcomes, content and assessment tasks for a module, you do it in such a way that it progresses gradually from easy to complex. So, when you are asked to cut out stuff that you might not cover due to lost time, it becomes difficult to decide on the sections you want to leave out because to you they are all important (Zizile 23/04/2020).

Based on the above comment, one realizes the emotional and psychological strain some staff members were under. After the submission of the templates, staff members were asked to prepare teaching materials for Moodle. We received diverse responses in this regard. Some staff members were very receptive and excited about online teaching as we see in the illuminative quotations below from Musa and Ravil:

This was great and it gave me an opportunity to experiment with innovative teaching tools. These e-Learning tools can be manipulated to perform a variety of functions which in turn facilitate a better learning process (Musa 24/04/2020).

I loved it ... it gives a lot of flexibility on time and geographical location. It enables students to work on their own pace without any hindrance and they can access materials from anywhere. This will surely enhance the learning process (Ravil 24/04/2020)

From these quotations, one realizes that these academics were enthusiastic about the move to online teaching as it gave them an opportunity to use a wide range of instructional strategies and appropriate media to enhance learning process. However, there were those who had other preferences:

I understand that the University is doing this because of covid-19 and

were unable to have face-to-face instruction on campus. For me, I believe human interaction is essential as I am able to give prudent advice to students there and there unlike teaching online (Zodwa 23/4/25).

Lecturers put things in context and students engage robustly as they debate issues face-to-face. I believe in real world and not the virtual one. Don't get me wrong, I am not against online teaching but I would prefer it as a support to my lectures. I understand that circumstances now force us to use it (Thulani 24/04/2020).

5.2.2 *The Dry Run*

The University made use of a dry run to pilot how the actual online teaching would take place and to troubleshoot. With this, academics were not expected to teach new content and to record assessment marks. The aim was to ascertain lecturers' readiness to engage with online learning.

After the dry run was finished, a virtual engagement day with some academic staff was organised, with the aim of reflecting on the online teaching and learning. Each cluster presented a report. Three key issues were highlighted:

1. What enablers and constraints were encountered during the Dry Run?
2. What is the level and extent of student participation/engagement?
3. What measures were or will be put in place to overcome challenges of remote teaching and assessment?

The following were some of the positive staff responses in relation to the first question, as noted in the School of Education Virtual Engagement Day Report:

- Positive Student responses: Some excited to participate; some logging in, accessing and downloading material; some downloading videos; some actively engaging – encouraging and motivating.
- Means of communication: WhatsApp and Zoom chats have proved to be successful as a means of communication with some students.

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- Successful strategies: PowerPoint with Audio, pre-recorded lectures, and written-out lectures appear to be user-friendly for students who may access material where and when they want.
- Use of Zoom: Appear best kept for questions, discussion and revision.
- Use of Kaltura: Appear useful to save large video-recordings.
- Inclusion of contract staff and markers on Moodle.
- Assessment via email and Moodle: Some students have indicated a willingness to use online submission tools for assessment.

However, some responses were negative. Below are some of the examples:

- Some difficulties were noted with essay assignments on Moodle.
- Some staff still struggling with some features of Zoom, Moodle, online assessment, and Power Point with Audio – need continued staff workshops and training.
- Data consumption is too high when conducting lectures through Zoom conferencing.
- Audio-recorded PowerPoint presentation is much better than teaching through Zoom.
- Workshops are sometimes overwhelming – too much taught at one go – difficult to process – if connectivity or sound fails on either side, miss much of what has occurred – suggest shorter workshops with smaller content chunks.
- Poor network connectivity resulted in interruptions when teaching via Zoom.

With regard to the second question, the following was highlighted:

- Varying levels of student engagement – as low as 17% to as high as 99%.
- Many students lack focus and enthusiasm to engage.
- There was some engagement on Moodle and WhatsApp; responses to email and Moodle were low.
- WhatsApp group – despite rules of engagement, much fooling around, private conversations and jokes; some rudeness and

abuse – generally a lack of focus – often many messages being sent within the day, not all relevant or work-related.

- Lack of computer literacy hinders engagement.

Thulani commented:

This is very frustrating, because the students are not responding and one might be perceived as someone who is not doing his duties. But I think they are either influenced or confused by all the statements uttered on mainstream media and social networks (1/05/2020).

This shows that academics were stressed. Some bemoaned the lack of leadership and directions from the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, whom they felt was unable to present a concrete and decisive plan of action. Thobani stated,

... this whole confusion is caused by the lack of leadership from our Minister, Dr Nzimande, who up until now has not presented any visionary guidance (Thobani, 1/5/2020).

With regard to the third question, *‘What measures were or will be put in place to overcome challenges of remote teaching and assessment’*, the following issues arose:

- A need to keep Moodle and WhatsApp as parallel mediums to engage students. Post/share materials/documents on both platforms.
- Microsoft Teams and Google Meet are proving to be very useful to enable access and engagement, even on cellphones.
- A YouTube channel has been set up to post videos (Music Education).
- Besides Moodle, Zoom and WhatsApp, there is a need to research other possible platforms.
- Asynchronous teaching and learning (Recorded lectures, Power Point with audio, written out lectures) – much more user-friendly than synchronous real-time teaching and learning – students may access when and where they want.
- Class representatives’ involvement was very useful.

The above examples show that the University has readied itself to confront the corona virus challenges, and that even though online learning might have challenges, participating lecturers are supportive.

5.2.3 Staff Training for Online Teaching

All the participants pointed out that the University toils industriously in training staff. All participants agreed that training sessions and workshops have been organised by the University to prepare them for online teaching, and these were fruitful.

UKZN also ensured that no staff was left behind, utilising the following: teaching through the use of Zoom platform, which included how to host a meeting, how to be a participant and use the Zoom tools, how to use PowerPoint with or without audio and also the use of online assessment tools. Some were innovative with teaching strategies such as blended learning, or the use of flipped classrooms, whilst others continued with the traditional method of PowerPoint presentations. Thus, when the University decided to move to online teaching, there was a need to train staff to acquaint them with different interaction and communicative online platforms.

The training started on-campus before the lockdown was imposed and continued during lockdown via Zoom. The use of Zoom during workshops and meetings has instilled confidence in staff to engage, operate and acquaint themselves with this interactive and communicative platform.

5.2.3.1 Training Academics on using Zoom and Moodle Technologies

Academics were expected to engage with their students through Zoom and also Moodle platforms. More importantly, staff were trained on Zoom conferencing. Participants indicated the following.

Of the eight participating lecturers, six mentioned Zoom conferencing and its benefits. Below is a brief discussion about the benefits of using Zoom conferencing.

Zoom Conferencing

The main benefit of Zoom conferencing is that it made the virtual classroom a reality. It also saved student and staff transportation costs as they could work

from home. Its chatroom and discussion forums promoted deep immersive learning as well as enabling participation.

A second point was its simplicity and user-friendliness. Six of the participants mentioned simplicity and user-friendliness as key benefits of zoom conferencing. They indicated that the use of Zoom conferencing during teaching was of importance due to its simplicity and user-friendliness. For example, video lessons through Zoom technology were vital, as students could access them at any time. Also, one does not need to travel; therefore travelling costs are omitted. Some students were found never or seldom to have visited the Moodle site, according to the Moodle-recorded visits per student. Therefore, the lecturers indicated that the use of zoom conferencing made the lessons vibrant, effective, and enjoyable to students during their live teaching. For example, Zodwa prefers the use of Zoom conferencing to WhatsApp or Skype, due to its simplicity and user-friendliness. *'I find it [Zoom conferencing] simple and user-friendly more than Skype and WhatsApp'* (Zodwa). This suggests that the transition to the virtual classroom was made successfully.

Moodle Technologies

Most of the academic staff used traditional methods of assessments. Thus, the University also provided training through demonstrations and PowerPoint with audio presentations. Academics were shown how to prepare quizzes, paragraph and essay type questions, and also how to assess these online, using Moodle. Some academics found the exercise both challenging and intriguing as evident in Rival's comment:

Oh! I was so excited to engage with all these technological assessment tools the workshop facilitator demonstrated to us. I was practising as he was presenting so that I internalise procedure. For me, it was challenging but at the same time exciting, as I was exposed to new assessment strategies (Rival 27/4/2020)

I wish to thank the University for organising all these training sessions for us who are new to all this online teaching, and particularly the presenters who have done the job diligently, to ensure all of us are

equipped with skills to teach and assess online, ... skills we never dreamt about before ... (Nqobile 28/4/2020).

5.2.4 Library Support

UKZN has made a substantial investment in e-books and other online resources. E-book portals such as Ebscohost e-book collection, Proquest E-book Central, IEEE Xplore book collection and Knovel Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics books were added to the existing portfolio of online resources. It is important to note that all these measures have been in place even before the Corona virus outbreak.

5.2.5 Students with a Disability

Document analysis revealed that students with disability received good care. This includes e-mails written to staff to alert them about such students. The following is an example of communication to staff:

I trust you are well and keeping safe. I write to you with regards to student Bhabhiza (pseudonym) who is in receipt of specialized services from the disability unit. She is registered for the following modules ... She will require 15 minutes extra for every one hour in tests and exams and extended time for assignment submissions-to be decided upon by the student and the lecturer (Thandi /2020).

This correspondence shows the pastoral care extended to disabled students. Lecturers were also patient and supportive of these students.

6 Discussion

The article has reported on the outcomes of a study exploring academics' perceptions and experiences of moving to online teaching within the context of COVID-19. The majority of the participants commended the response taken by the University to move to online teaching. Furthermore, they commended the support the University gave to academics and appreciated the support by online teaching specialists. This shows that the University catered for

individual needs of all staff and students. Participants also saw online teaching as important to complement teaching at universities even beyond the COVID-19 outbreak. It would appear that they consider online teaching as an integral part of a university learning experience, even for a university where learning is pre-dominantly campus based. This suggests a major paradigm shift, which Hart and Christensen (2002) refer to as ‘the disruptive technology’ of e-learning as the university gravitates towards blended learning.

It is significant that online learning avails knowledge to users disregarding time restrictions and geographic proximity (Sun *et al.* 2008). It was also of concern that most students might not have access to the internet connection as they came from disadvantaged rural communities. While the benefits of online learning are well-documented (Williams & Goldberg 2005; Aparicio, Bacao & Oliveria 2016; Stephen & Preist 2017; Gordijn, Oosterhout & Dijkstra 2017; Petschenka *et al.* 2017), it continues to exclude students from disadvantaged communities. The virtual classroom discussed included Moodle forums, the use of Zoom, Kaltura and WhatsApp. In many cases it allowed for deep, immersive learning and increased self-regulated learning practices.

7 Conclusion

The Coronavirus pandemic has necessitated a paradigm shift in the way we view higher education. Our study indicates that the switch to the virtual classroom was undertaken successfully, albeit that this is still in an infant stage and therefore premature to draw definitive conclusions. Whilst cognisant of the fact that online teaching and learning at university are at a relatively early stage, research suggests that lecturers positively embrace online teaching and that despite the pandemic, moral is generally high.

8 Recommendations

The paper recommends that universities across the globe need to ensure that no student or staff is left behind. Universities should ensure training in virtual teaching continues as a permanent fixture of staff training. Finally, we encourage lecturers to use the poll feature on Zoom, which focuses student attention and make learning an enjoyable, interactive event.

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