Chapter 11

Reflecting on Digital Summative Assessments during COVID-19 Lockdown at a South African University:
The Accounts of Social Work Academics

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Abstract

In South Africa and around the world, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a series of lockdowns. This necessitated sudden shifts in teaching, learning and assessment, from the traditional classroom environment towards digital platforms. Academics, including social work academics, were caught off-guard and the shift had numerous implications for the processes of curriculum planning and implementation. The people-centred nature of social work presented unique challenges for the summative assessment process. As a result, the digital shift required of social work academics to reflect and rethink summative assessments. These reflective accounts called attention to the multiple contextual challenges that affect social work academics and undergraduate students when administering digital summative assessments. This chapter adds to the body of knowledge on effective teaching, learning and assessment in higher education in the dual era of digitization and lockdown.

Keywords: Digital summative assessments, Covid-19, lockdown, social work

1 Introduction and Background

It is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic is not solely a public health issue, but a challenge that is affecting all spheres of life, including the higher education sector (Shahzad *et al.* 2020; UNESCO 2020). Similar to other parts of the world, education institutions in South Africa were forced into a lockdown. which affected significant operations of teaching and learning (Mncube, Mutongoza & Olawale 2021). In South Africa, the catastrophe of the Covid-19 pandemic became a reality in March 2020 when the President of the country declared a National State of Disaster in terms of the *Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002* (RSA 2002; Landa, Zhou & Marongwe 2021; Mncube *et al.* 2021; Staunton, Swanepoel & Labuschaigne 2020). The South African government had to strike a balance between the aspirations of saving the 2020 academic year versus reducing the spread of the virus. Swift measures such as the total migration to online platforms of teaching, learning and assessment had to be taken in order to save the academic year while observing public health precautions. Social work education was no exception.

The social work profession has always been regarded as a people-centred profession, which is important when considering teaching, learning and assessment (Safodien 2021). Training of social work students also requires professional socialisation, within a classroom environment, which is rooted in a specific ideological base that deeply values interaction during teaching, learning and assessment (Simpson 2015). According to Makhanya and Zibane (2020:8), 'a university lecture hall is one of the university spaces that is assumed to promote critical engagements and to nurture the growth and development of social work students'. However, Simpson (2015) argues that large classes pose a threat to the professional socialisation and reciprocal interaction of social work students during teaching, learning and assessments. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the traditional pedagogy of this specific profession had to shift towards the digitisation of teaching, learning and assessment. The digitisation of summative assessments came with distinct dynamics that are fuelled by South Africa's contextual challenges, including inequality and massification in higher education.

The chapter therefore highlights the reflective experiences of the authors, who are social work academics, regarding the practical implications of digital summative assessments in a South African university. These reflections have been done in relation to first-, second-, third- and fourth-year students from the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme.

In order of sequence, this chapter firstly presents the context of teaching,

learning and assessment in social work education. Then, an overview of challenges in higher education locally and globally is provided. Thirdly, the actual reflections about digital summative assessments in the era of Covid-19 lockdowns are presented. Lastly, strategies for addressing the challenges are proposed.

2 Teaching, Learning and Assessments in Social Work

At global and national levels, considerable progress has been made in terms of developing social work education and the profession (Simpson 2015). The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW 2014:1) argues that

> social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development.

These factors are crucial and worth considering in this chapter, as it focuses on the administration of digital summative assessment processes of social work as a practice-based academic discipline.

The Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme is a four-year, undergraduate programme that is registered with the National Qualifications Framework. Social work education in South Africa is underpinned by a policy document of the Council for Higher Education [CHE] (2015), namely the *Qualification Standards for Bachelor of Social Work*. This policy frames teaching, learning and assessments at all South African higher education institutions that offers social work. The BSW programme has theoretical and practical modules as per the prescripts of this policy. Each module aims to achieve at least one or a combination of the BSW standards that are contained in this policy. Similar to the Bloom's Taxonomy of Assessment, this policy also holds the premise that each level of social work education has distinct learning outcomes that are specific for each level of study. For example, first-year students are mostly expected to cover the principles, values and foundations of the profession, and from the four social work modules done in first year, two modules are practical. At the second-year level, social work application of the knowledge, skills and values of social work practice is covered. Once again, from the four modules done at this level, two are practical. At the third and fourth-year-levels of study, theory modules and in-service learning that requires of students to go out to

specific institutions then happens. Simpson (2015:565) argues that,

> The purpose of teaching in professional disciplines differs from peda-
> gogies in other academic disciplines. Not only must the student learn
> the knowledge required for the profession, but they must also learn what
> it means to be a professional.

Given this argument, one of the BSW standards in terms of the above policy, expects students to demonstrate knowledge, practical skills and theories. Accordingly, the social work assessments are therefore crafted in a manner that accommodates the practical and theoretical requirements of social work education. However, digitisation and Covid-19 disordered the pedagogy of these processes; hence the need to rethink, reflect and re-strategize for the era that Safodien (2021) refers to as 'Social Work 4.0' or the 'e-social work' era. An overview of the challenges in social work education, exacerbated by digitisation, therefore needs scrutiny.

3 Challenges of Digitisation in South African Higher Education: A Focus on Social Work

3.1 Inequality

South Africa as a whole, including higher education, is characterised by deep inequality (Staunton *et al.* 2020). Makhanya (2020) supports this by revealing that the hidden norms of racial division, class division and inequality continue to exclude poor and disadvantaged social work students. Furthermore, existing inequality in South Africa's higher education system was compounded by the sudden digitisation of teaching and learning. The higher education leadership therefore had the challenge of dealing with inequality and fast-tracking digi-tisation in preparation for assessments, within the context of the new requirement to work from home. The UNESCO (2020) report on Covid-19 captures this predicament succinctly when it states that,

> authorities must on the one hand prioritise efforts aimed at maintaining
> contact and educational continuity for those populations that have
> greater difficulty connecting and live in social and economic conditions
> that are least conducive to supporting education processes at home, and,

on the other hand, design protocols for resuming and continuing education … which take into account the differences and inequalities ….

Within the South African context, the advent of Covid-19 meant that the President had to declare a National State of Disaster, which introduced a series of lockdowns in order to curb the spread of the virus (Mncube *et al.* 2021). This meant academics and students would work from home.

When working from home, inequality in terms of the urban-rural divide is particularly challenging because of limited educational resources in rural, as opposed to urban South Africa. Social work academics such as Kajiita, Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe (2020:25) point out in their paper that 'resources such as internet connectivity, availability of electricity, and devices were lacking among rural based students'. This is specifically the case where online resources and connectivity are concerned, with many in rural areas struggling with a lack of resources and connectivity, which would invariably affect online teaching, learning and assessments. Mncube *et al.* (2021:392) affirm this when they point out that the pandemic exposed 'many inadequacies and inequities in the education systems that ranges from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning'.

In their study, 'Complexities in Student Placements under Covid-19 Moral and Practical Considerations', Sarbu and Unwin (2021:1) in the United Kingdom revealed that social work 'students responded and reported that the moral and practical consequences of a sudden forced move to the "new normal" of online working and assessment raised serious issues about the boundary between home and work life'. This signifies that the digitisation that is related to Covid-19 affected social work education even in European countries. However, within the South African context, inequality was one of the key factors that exacerbated the challenges of teaching, learning and assessment. This is supported by Safodien (2021:259), who asserts that 'the issues of inequality and personal identity are challenges that fall directly within the scope of practice of the social work profession'. According to IFSW (2014), the broad principles of social work, namely social justice, doing no harm, respect for human rights, diversity and the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings, underpin the importance of scrutinising these issues within social work education (IFSW 2014). The consequences of inequality and social injustices that affect students in higher education requires critical examination.

3.2 Massification, Assessments and Social Work

Scott (1995, cited in Adetiba 2019:6) describes 'massification as the rapid increase in student enrolment in higher education'. The end of apartheid meant there was a move towards making higher education accessible to the masses and not just the elite. This process was referred to as massification of higher education, which meant the increased and rapid acceptance of more non-white and poor students into higher education institutions. With the move to massification, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) wanted to improve the economy and the social status of the majority of South Africans as well as provide vital skills to the economy (DHET 2014). Within the context of massification, social work student numbers have also increased (Simpson 2015). Massification in social work teaching, learning and assessment was particularly detrimental, because the increasing student numbers were not matched with increasing staff numbers, which affected the quality of social work student practice (ibid). The supplementary challenge of Covid-19 and digitisation made these issues even worse because of the 'digital poverty' of students, where they could not afford the necessary information technology hardware for them to study effectively from home (Sarbu & Unwin 2021). Moreover, social work students need to be socialised professionally to exit higher learning in order to be ready to work with people face to face outside the context of digitisation. In addition, Simpson (2015) argues that the nature of the social work profession requires the 'professional socialization of students', where there could be opportunities for incidental and practical learning. Similarly, Sarbu and Unwin (2021:1) state that 'opportunities for incidental and tacit forms of learning were lacking in online working environments'.

Nukunah, Bezuidenhout and Furtak (2019) express that massification has led to the need for educational resources that governments cannot provide. In turn, this has affected quality of teaching, learning and assessments overall, including social work education. Yet another concern is that, despite the improved access, there is a lack of academic success and throughput rates of students (Manik 2015). The emergence of Covid-19 with its numerous resource challenges simply exacerbated existing teaching, learning and assessment challenges in social work which were largely a by-product of inequality and massification in the higher education sector. Other challenges that are associated with large classes include compromise integrity, validity and reliability of assessments (Atkin, Black & Coffey, 2001; Secolsky & Denison 2012).

The next section presents the reflections of authors within the context of all these challenges that affect the administration of summative assessments.

4 Reflections: Digital Summative Assessments during the Covid-19 Lockdown

4.1 *Institutional Challenges and the Administration of Digital Summative Assessments: The Transition Struggle*

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, various communications, both nationally by our South African president and from the university, conveyed the message that teaching and learning in higher education would continue online and that no student should be left behind (DHET 2020). Training subsequently began online on how to navigate online platforms for teaching and learning. However, under immeasurable pressure to make things work in these novel circumstances there were unsurprisingly no specifics on how to tailor assessments to suit these online platforms and for best practice. Commenting on this pressure, Mpungose (2020:2) states that lecturers were 'forced to adapt their teaching approaches without a clear roadmap'. There was clarity on our part as academics; our role was to assist students to learn for the administration of continuous assessments at a formative and a summative level.

As social work academics, we were ambivalent about the use of digital assessments, because we lacked knowledge on how to prevent unethical behaviour of students when participating in digital summative assessments, especially in our profession that has a clear code of ethics that promotes morality. It was impossible to ensure that students would do their digital summative assessments with integrity. Previous studies have revealed that digital teaching and blended learning approaches have always been accepted reluctantly by academics in the South African higher education system, prior to the transition that was brought about by Covid-19 lockdowns (Davis 1993; Tshabalala, Ndeya-Ndereya & Van der Merwe 2014). Over the years, academics' perception of online learning has been a barrier to the transition to digitisation, although higher education institutions in South Africa have slowly been introducing digital learning over the years (Tshabalala *et al.* 2014). Warburton (2008) also reveals some of the factors that hinder the acceptance of innovation and electronic

assessment by academics. These factors include fear of failure in academics, difficulty in using electronic systems, and lack of digital resources (ibid). Another study by McCann (2010) indicates that some academic staff were reluctant to conduct e-assessments because they were already doing excellent work administering assessments traditionally.

A study by Bagarukayo and Kalema (2015) evaluating e-learning usage at South African higher education institutions before Covid-19, correctly argues that challenges of adopting e-learning were more complex and structural. These authors indicate that the structural challenges that impede the transition include lack of infra-structure challenges, shortage of skilled staff, large classes, multi-lingualism, unequal access, inadequate technical support, poor user support, lack of university policy, technological challenges and lack of pedological strategies (ibid). The study seemed to pre-empt the difficulties that would come as Covid-19 forced all higher education institutions in South Africa to migrate to online. Complications for social work academics and students as a result of Covid-19 were further exacerbated by the lack of preparedness of the university structures to deal with the demands of the transition to digitisation. It took some time for the university to provide all staff and students with electronic devices and data to ensure that working from home was viable. The institutional support showed disorganisation, mixed messages and contradictions, which created further panic and a sense of insecurity to an already tenuous situation. For example, university sessional dates were adjusted several times during the 2020 academic year. Despite all these challenges, the prevalent message that was communicated by the government was to 'save the 2020 academic year' (DHET 2020). This message added pressure to an already shaky academic year. The non-existence of updated internal assessment policies for the transition posed a challenge for us in administering summative assessments.

As a result, the route that we also followed was to set summative assessments in a similar way as we had done during face-to-face teaching and to simply transfer our previous way of assessing to the online platforms. Knight (2002:276) cites Entwistle (1996:11-112), who states:

> The single strongest influence on learning is surely the assessment procedures … even the form of an examination question or essay topics set can affect how students' study … it is also important to remember that entrenched attitudes which support traditional methods of teaching and assessments are hard to change.

In other words, our inclination to simply continue traditional ways of assessing online was inevitable, especially with no concrete guidance on how to do it differently. This undoubtedly posed challenges to the administration of digital summative assessments for us as well as the students.

4.2 The Overemphasis of Summative Assessments

Summative assessments have been the subject of academic debates due to the evolving context of teaching and learning across the globe. A number of authors have argued that assessment, in general, is the heart of students' learning (Spiller 2012; Glazer 2014; Timmis, Sutherland & Oldfield 2016). In the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Assessment Policy (2012), summative assessment is defined as a type of assessment process that enables a total evaluation of the extent of the progress of students, at the end of a learning program or a finite part of the program. Nonetheless, Knight (2002) criticises the timing of summative assessments and their implications on teaching and learning. He argues that it provides 'performance feed-out' instead of useful feedback for further learning. He further states that feed-out in a summative assessment has a 'certifying' function instead of providing feedback for further learning (*ibid*). In support, Ahmed, Ali and Shah (2019:111) assert that 'it is important to notice that summative assessment focuses on past performance but does not offer possible direction to improve learners' performance in the future'. As social work academics, we also did not get the opportunity during lockdowns to provide feedback on digital summative assessments because of condensed semesters, constantly changing sessional dates, and limited time for marking restricted our ability to mentor students. Msiza, Raseroka and Ndhlovu (2020) argue that it is difficult to ensure proper feedback and student mentorship due to large classes in South African higher education. Glazer (2014) criticises the inclusion of both formative and summative assessments as unnecessary in higher education. She argues that 'formative plus summative assessments' are problematic because they increase the workload of both the students and academics. This is supported by Landa *et al.* (2021), who indicate that during the Covid-19 lockdowns, academics would find it difficult to administer summative assessments due to the overwhelming administrative demands of digital teaching and learning. The key message from the government and our institution was to save the academic year. Another challenges, within our context, was the fact that summative assessments were given more weighting in terms of importance because they

were awarded marks, whilst continuous and formative assessments were acceptable, but were not to be awarded marks. This had implications for social work, in that many of our continuous assessments were crucial to student learning; however, since they were not awarded marks, students did not take them seriously. This was evidenced by poor attendance during these assessments. Based on our experience, marks were a commodity for our social work students and served as motivation for them to participate in assessments. This was particularly problematic for us because of the biased mandate towards summative assessments we received from our university. Given all these challenges, Timmis *et al.* (2020) then advocate the need to rethink assessments more especially in the era of Covid-19 and digitization.

4.3   The Home as an Office and/ or Study Space

The mandate to work from home, as a result of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, caught us, including other academics, unprepared. One of the main challenges was to balance home-life and work demands. The whole of South Africa was under lockdown, and as a result, university students and staff were sent home while the movement would be highly restricted. As colleagues with children, with one of us also having elderly parents to consider, we both had to make important decisions under pressure. We decided to move to our respective rural homes to safeguard ourselves and our families. Home as an office and or study space was not conducive for us, as well as for many social work students and colleagues. This is supported by Sarbu and Unwin (2021) how social work students at the University of Worcester felt about the sudden shift to working online. These researchers indicate that social work students raised serious issues about the boundary between home and work life, and the relationship-based nature of social work, which was compromised by online education (ibid). Consequently, our teaching was compromised because of lacking tacit and incidental forms of learning during remote teaching, whilst they are integral to social work learning. Summative assessments in the South African social work higher education learning context invariably lacked the tacit and incidental component as well, given their digital nature during Covid-19 lockdown.

Other issues that exacerbated the challenges were the fact that students and colleagues, as well as us also experienced the illness and/or death of loved ones from Covid-19. The events described also affected our mental health and students' mental health alike. All the concerns outlined were genuine for many

social work students and colleagues. However, these concerns would compromise the integrity of the summative assessments set, because it was impossible to prove whether the challenges communicated were genuine or not, especially when students would not attempt assessments.

In addition, a common problem that we also observed amongst our students was unstable and unpredictable electricity and network coverage. Kakepoto *et al.* (2021) reveal that slow internet speed, expensive internet packages, poor computer literacy and loadshedding of electricity were some of the key factors that affected both academics and students during digital teaching and learning in the lockdown era.

Msiza *et al.* (2020) argue that some students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds would normally use a computer in higher education for the first time. Computer illiteracy also limited the fair participation of our students in digital summative assessments, but this was worse for first-year social work students. Mthethwa (2018, cited in Makhanya 2020:109), states that 'poor [social work] students coming from rural areas remain unprepared for such technological pressures'. A factor that exacerbated the challenges of computer illiterate students was the requirement for students to seek help through digital means.

Our social work students also reported competing socio-educational demands, where assessments were competing with challenges such as being required to do chores or being abused physically or mentally. Students would therefore request more time to do digital summative assessments. There were students that described living in conditions that were overcrowded, and this was observed when some students would switch on their cameras during virtual class sessions.

The research findings of Dube (2020:136) reveals that,

> while the South African government is promoting online learning as the only alternative in the context of Covid-19, this mode excludes many rural learners from teaching and learning, due to a lack of resources to connect to the internet, the learning management system and low-tech software.

This then indicates that the challenges of digital summative assessments were also exacerbated by the socio-economic dynamics of rural and disadvantaged South Africa. Consequently, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those from rural areas, were inevitably excluded by the shift to digital platforms.

4.4 Massification and Summative Assessments in Social Work Practice Modules

Large classes are the norm in South African higher education. Simpson (2015: 564) argues that the 'improved access to higher education and the increase in student numbers without a simultaneous increase in resources has given rise to numerous challenges'. The Social Work department is an example of an increase in student numbers, which did not include an increase in resources. In 2020, a limited number of 11 academics had to work with a minimum of 160 students in each undergraduate module. These few academics also had to render post-graduate supervision, community engagement and other administrative duties. While dealing with these large student numbers, the Covid-19 lockdown necessitated that we also had to design, implement and moderate digital assessments. The choice of some of our assessments was influenced by large numbers. In all our modules from the first, second, third and fourth year we implemented eMCQs that were quicker to administer and mark. However, the nature of the Social Work curriculum requires critical engagement and more practical and professional socialization of students (Sewpaul 2010; Simpson 2015).

For example, in a practice module at an exit level (fourth year), students had to submit a physical portfolio of evidence for their field practice, prior to the Covid-19 lockdowns. However, due to the swift digitization that was associated with Covid-19 lockdowns we had to adopt a convenient method of allowing students to submit an e-portfolio. The e-portfolio allowed students a chance to submit unlimited pages for marking. As a result, finalizing the marking and providing intensive feedback to students was a struggle due to the compression of the 2020 semesters and the large number of students. Having to mark an average of 160 assessments and sending them to students via e-mail were a reality that we were faced with. Working non-stop and long hours were the order of the day. We were obliged to meet the deadlines of assessments and also ensure 'catch-up' assessments continuously for those students who did not attempt to participate in summative assessments. This further highlights the need to rethink more efficient ways to administer digital summative assessments.

4.5 Cheating, Plagiarism and eMCQs: Challenges of Integrity on Digital Summative Assessments

During Covid-19 lockdowns, large student numbers and time limitations were some of the factors that gave impetus for the social work discipline to adopt

electronic multiple-choice questions (eMCQ) as one of the main strategies for summative assessment. The eMCQs were administered from the Moodle platform. Singh and De Villiers (2017) appraise the use of eMCQ assessments. They argue that the advantages of this assessment strategy included 'rapid automated marking; it is more convenient in large classes; it has replaced the burden of labour-intensive traditional marking; the marking is objective and unbiased; exams have specified durations or open-ended periods; and there is a possibility of covering of broad ranges of topics' (*ibid*:165). On the other hand, Hedding *et al.* (2020:) argue that 'academic staff at contact universities typically have little, if any, experience or training in the pedagogy or delivery of online learning'. Due to lack of training, we also experienced numerous challenges regarding digital summative assessments. One of the challenges in the administration of eMCQs as summative assessments was technical inadequacies in administering eMCQs on Moodle. The use of Moodle as a mode of implementing digital summative assessments brought a number of challenges for us, which included non-proctored cheating, plagiarism and sharing of answers amongst students. Likewise, Mpungose (2019a:5033) also criticises the use of Moodle as a learning environment by asserting that 'Moodle was officially introduced without clear exposition of the underpinning theory, training, and implementation framework for its adoption'. Additionally, Pinar (2004, cited in Msiza *et al.* 2020:48), criticizes the use of eMCQs, in that this approach is 'an anti-intellectual project that reduces academics to mere technicians'. We also felt the unsolicited obligation of using a digital platform for summative assessments. Due to lack of training and experience, in our initial attempts to use eMCQs we struggled to use technical features that are available on Moodle, such as reshuffling of questions and deferred feedback on correct answers, amongst others. These Moodle features were later discovered through experiential learning, and thereafter they served minimally to control the degree of cheating by some social work students.

Despite having Moodle features such the reshuffling option and the option of deferring correct answers, cheating and unethical sharing of answers through social media were other challenges we experienced. At a loss, we questioned the integrity of the assessments, which we felt were somewhat compromised. Msiza *et al.* (2020) argue that cyber cheating is amongst the key challenges that academics are facing in the era of massification and digitalization in higher education. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, we came across numerous cases of cheating. It was quite worrying to encounter flagrant cheating during

eMCQ summative assessments, evidenced by some students' reporting sharing of answers through WhatsApp groups and other social media platforms. In addition, Mpungose (2019b) and Manca (2020) reveal that WhatsApp and other social media are amongst the most-used platforms for digital learning, but the use of social media is a vehicle for cheating.

Prior to Covid-19 lockdowns, summative assessments were implementted face-to-face and in an invigilated environment in order to prevent cheating. Gamage, De Silva and Gunawardhana (2020) support this assertion when they argue that invigilated assessments are often considered as more secure, but they are not an option with online learning. Furthermore, detecting any cheating would be significantly challenging (ibid). We also struggled to detect cheating due to the unavailability of digital proctoring tools, as described by Brouwer, Heck and Smit (2017). Brouwer *et al.* (2017) evaluate a digital software tool called ProctorExam Pro, which they use in their study to prove its effectiveness in preventing cheating on digital assessments. In our case, we did not have such resources; moreover, virtual invigilation is highly expensive (Gamage *et al.* 2020).

Other social work assessments included essays that were marked online. Ndebele (2020:39) points out that 'plagiarism has become a recurrent challenge in higher education institutions, threatening the integrity of universities and their academic standards'. As social work academics we have co-existed with the challenges of cheating and plagiarism prior to the catastrophe of Covid-19 lockdowns and it is indeed a threat to the integrity of assessments in higher education. The recent shift to digital teaching and learning worsened the manifestation of this challenge. Anney and Mosha (2015, cited in Ndebele 2020: 42), argue that the growth and improved access to the internet is a basic factor that has made student plagiarism more sophisticated and more tempting, and this was our experience with some of the social work students.

Ndebele (2020:39) further asserts that,

> many universities have thus instituted reactive measures that focus on detecting and policing plagiarism with little consideration of proactive and educational measures that can address the primary reasons for plagiarism and foster a community of academic integrity on their campuses.

This assertion by Ndebele (2020) indicates that universities need to

interrogate the causes of plagiarism thoroughly, rather than being reactive in dealing with plagiarism.

During the era of Covid-19 lockdowns, cheating and plagiarism within our context were also compounded by large class numbers, time limitations, an unstable infrastructure for online learning, socio-economic dynamics of students and lack of experience of using online platforms by ourselves as academics. As a result, rethinking the process of assessments is crucial.

5 Recommendations: Rethinking Digital Summative Assessments

In line with the above challenges, as social work academics we have learnt that there is a need to rethink carefully what the ideal digital platform in our context is when administering summative assessments. The knowledge that one size does not fit all needs practical application. With this consideration in mind, the following are some of the areas that need rethinking where digital summative assessments in social work are concerned.

5.1 Online Digital Literacy and Integrity Module

Given the challenges of digital illiteracy amongst social work students, considering having an online digital literacy module would be a viable solution to assist students who start to use a computer for the first time when entering higher education. This would also assist social work undergraduate students who had limited skills, as well as assist students to become comfortable with the learning platforms in university. To deal with issues of plagiarism and cheating, which affect the reliability and validity of summative assessments, the digital literary module would also include a section on integrity, where professional ethics would be taught and discussed, as well as step-by-step teaching on writing without plagiarizing.

5.2 Thinking Contextually about Digital Summative Assessments

It is imperative to reiterate the importance of the fact that at the core of teaching, learning and assessments is the student. The dynamics of students must be

considered, because they either enable or disable the process of digital summative assessments and the digital pedagogy as a whole. The iteration by the Department of Higher Education that no student should be left behind was on the basis of understanding how valuable each individual student is. As emphasized previously, the students that we teach in the era of massification come from varied backgrounds. Many of the students in social work in particular emerge from disadvantaged backgrounds and environments that do not support the digitisation of summative assessments. It is therefore necessary to rethink some of the types of summative assessments students are given. The option of co-creating assessment with students is worth exploring.

Another alternative is creating a reflective journal for both staff and students that would capture the lived experiences of staff and students, providing important opportunities to develop and advance knowledge for staff and students reciprocally. Added to this would be reflective teaching by staff as well as concerted staff accountability programmes.

5.3 *Policy Reform and the Pedagogy of Digital Assessments*

Training of staff on the pedagogy of digital assessments and the execution of appropriate and contextual online learning is a gap in the current era. As previously stated, there was a definite lack of planning for transitional assessment strategies because of the accelerated move to digitization. To improve teaching, learning and assessments, and specifically digital summative assessments, clear guidelines, standardization of transitional policy and legislation are needed to safeguard academics and students, as well as the integrity of summative assessments overall. Added to this, the provision of more resources and staff to manage large student numbers is imperative.

6 Conclusion

The Covid-19 lockdown and digitization of teaching and learning processes caught all academics including social work academics off-guard. The implycations of the Covid-19 pandemic were unprecedented in our time. Higher education and all other sectors in our society were plunged into a survival mode that prevented adequate reflection on an appropriate and contextual way forward. This chapter was an attempt to reflect and contextualise specific experiences of two academics in social work when administering digital summative assess-

ments. Areas of scrutiny in the administration of summative assessments included the rapid transition to digitisation, inequality, massification and contextualisation. The aim of the academic reflections was to highlight inadequacies in policies and practices in this new era with the aim of paving an improved way forward for students and social work students in particular. This was done through by reflecting on our experiences with the ultimate aim of reapplying the lessons learnt from the process.

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