

Original Research Report



Impact of COVID-19 on Teaching and Learning: Perspectives of South African University Lecturers

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Abstract: This study sought the perspectives of South African lecturers on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. In this study, 28 university teachers in three South African provinces were interviewed using a qualitative research method and phenomenological case study design. Utilizing a series of verified interviews, qualitative data were gathered. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that were gathered. According to the study's findings, faculty members in the field of education viewed COVID-19's plan to allow them to work from home as a bad development since it left them psychologically spent and had a detrimental impact on their ability to teach and learn. Additionally, the study participants claimed that the distractions brought on by household duties caused working from home to impair their academic output. In conclusion, COVID-19 had a detrimental influence on efficient teaching and learning in South African universities. In order to prevent a repeat of this unfavorable effect of COVID-19 in the future, it was advised that a suitable online learning platform be set up.

Keywords: Academics, COVID-19, Learning, Teaching, University Lecturers

1. Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, both teachers and students had to work from home. Since the COVID-19 epidemic hit, schools, institutions, and other educational facilities have been closed for over 94% of students worldwide (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Universities around the globe engage in virtual learning through work from home due to this circumstance. COVID-19 has substantially affected education worldwide, which is one of the most important factors determining any nation's economic future (Rajhans et al., 2020). Due to the shocks caused by the COVID-19 epidemic in the economic and educational sectors, individual attitudes toward work and jobs are expected to change (Egara et al., 2021; Kramer & Kramer, 2020). As a result of this new working situation, schools may be unable to provide quality teaching and learning (Eze et al., 2021; Realyvásquez-Vargas et al., 2020). There are numerous problems associated with higher education across the globe as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic (Gonzalez et al., 2020).

The skills necessary to effectively teach online were lacking for many professors before they were able to work from home (Putri et al., 2020). When the COVID-19 pandemic ended the 2019–2020 academic year, it was difficult to predict how cancellations would affect learning, according to Kuhfeld et al. (2020). Even though some academics partially worked from home during the outbreak, primarily for research, Walker et al. (2020) found that most teaching was done in person. Further, remote working requirements became necessary as a result of COVID-19 preventive control measures without much planning (Walker et al., 2020). To determine how academics assessed the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning, the researchers utilized the Person-Environment-Occupation Theory (PEOT) by Law, 1996.

Using the PEOT model, three elements are involved: the person (P), the environment (E), and the profession (O). Achieving occupational performance is the consequence of the interaction between these three factors (Law, 1996). As a result of this concept, a person's environment, occupation, and self are all interconnected and play a role in their occupational performance. Among the elements of the person domain are role, self-concept, cultural background, personality, health, cognition, physical performance, and sensory abilities. A person in this situation is a singular being whose duties are varied and indissociably connected to their context. In addition to their qualifications, abilities, information, and experiences, individuals bring a range of skills and experiences to their jobs. As a result of this theory, the researcher was able to gain insight into the lecturers' academic commitments during COVID-19.

During COVID-19, students had many difficulties, decreasing their participation in the classroom and interfering with learning possibilities (Ardi et al., 2022; Hill & Fitzgerald, 2020). The COVID-19 situation adversely affected academics because they felt that online learning and teaching required a great deal more preparation than face-to-face delivery did (Walker et al., 2020). Several factors, including teachers' and students' educational lives and the learning process, were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Eseadi (2023) and Suryaman et al. (2020). Energy and internet costs increased during COVID-19, which affected employee motivation and, therefore, the quality of teaching and learning (Purwanto et al., 2020). In many educational settings, the COVID-19 pandemic has positively impacted teaching and learning at many levels (Diale et al., 2023). The impact of COVID-19 is felt in a number of industries, including education, for a long time a result of disruptive events Arntz et al., 2020). A study by Rameez et al. (2020) found many difficulties in the administration of practical exams, in online distribution, and in evaluation, examination, supervision, and evaluation of COVID-19. COVID-19, the pandemic outbreak that forced many workers to work

from home, has impacted all aspects of life, particularly education, globally, according to Agasisti and Soncin (2021). A high level of worry was experienced by most students on account of the adverse effects of the COVID-19 situation on their ability to learn. Under COVID-19 conditions, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found that there is a lack of pedagogy that is compatible with face-to-face learning that negatively impacts teaching and learning. As Day et al. (2021) reported, COVID-19 had a negative impact on efficient teaching and learning because many students did not possess the necessary technology for online instruction. COVID-19 has been shown to negatively affect efficient teaching and learning in the educational sector, particularly in universities, in several studies conducted worldwide and particularly in Europe and America. According to the accessible literature, none of these studies were conducted in South Africa. Thus, to the researcher's knowledge, there is a void in the literature in the South African context concerning academics' perceptions of COVID-19'S effects on efficient teaching and learning.

1.1. Statement of Problem

COVID-19 has been shown to negatively affect efficient teaching and learning in the educational sector, particularly in universities, in several studies conducted worldwide and particularly in Europe and America. According to the accessible literature, none of these experiments were conducted in South Africa. There was a void in the literature in the South African context concerning academics' perceptions of COVID-19's effects on efficient teaching and learning. These left researchers wondering on what the perspectives of the University lecturers on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning might be.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study sought the perspectives of South African lecturers on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning.

1.3. Research Question

What are the perspectives of South African lecturers on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design for the Study

In this study, the researcher used a pragmatic research paradigm. This paradigm is applicable to this study since it directs the research design. Also, phenomenological case studies and qualitative research methods were used in the research. Study participants included academics from the faculty of education who shared their experience with COVID-19. This design was used by Thwala et al. (2020) in a related study.

2.1.1. Ethics Statement

All universities of the participants were notified ahead of time that the researchers needed ethical approval to collect data. In accordance with this, the application was approved. As well as adhering to pertinent ethical standards, the researchers adhered to relevant qualitative research standards. Before the interview began, informed consent forms were distributed to participants for completion and signature. In addition to declining enrollment at the outset, participants could also withdraw for any reason at any time. It was only when pseudonyms were used that the participants' real names

were revealed. No specific information about the participants will be included in the reports. The same applies to the participating universities. Direct participants will be invited to share their experiences after the study is completed.

2.2. Area of the Study

The Eastern Cape, Free State, and Gauteng provinces of South Africa were used as the study's sites. Over 19.7% of South Africa's population lives in Gauteng. Gauteng is the wealthiest province in South Africa when considering its overall current income. The Eastern Cape Province is the second largest in South Africa, after the Northern Cape, with a land area of almost 169 000 sqkm, or 13.9% of the country's total land area. It is divided into 38 local municipalities, 6 district municipalities, and 1 metropolitan municipality. The Eastern Cape's capital is Bisho, located in the Amathole District. Bloemfontein, the South African capital and seat of justice, serves as the capital of the Free State Province. Its historical roots can be found in the Orange Free State, a Boer republic that subsequently became the Orange Free State Province. The Free State is located on a series of level, pasture-sprinkled grassy plains that have an overall elevation of 3,800 feet, occasionally interrupted by hills or kopjes.

2.3. Population and Sample

The study was conducted at several universities in Gauteng, Free State, and Eastern Cape provinces in South Africa. For the study, all academic staff in the faculties of education at all eight (8) universities in three provinces of South Africa were the target population. There were 28 academics in the study drawn from eight (8) different province-based universities that are members of the faculties of education. In order to ensure the provinces' universities were properly chosen, a purposeful sampling of the 8 institutions was used. Participants were sampled by convenience sampling. In this way, the researcher had a choice of which academics they wanted to work with.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection and Study Procedure

Data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule, which included questions about how COVID-19 might affect efficient teaching and learning. The semi-structured interview was vetted by instrument development experts to ensure it measures what it is intended to measure. The researcher was able to confirm the reliability of the interview schedule by exposing it to a similar sample twice.

2.5. Data collection Technique

Participants who agreed to answer the semi-structured interview questions were emailed the interview schedule to gather qualitative information. Since travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic rendered a face-to-face interview impractical, the process was conducted online. Before asking them to return at a convenient time, the interviewees were given enough time to respond.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. During this process, participant interview responses are coded, sorted, categorized, and transcribed. Each participant's response was read multiple times to ensure high-quality data analysis by extracting key points from each response.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the topics that emerged from the thematic data analysis, the results were presented.

3.1. The first theme is the readiness of academics to work in a multimodal remote teaching environment.

The respondents were asked to specify during the course of the structured online interview their degree of readiness for employment in a multimodal remote teaching environment brought on by the COVID-19 situation. The excerpts from their comments are provided below.

"No, not before the Pandemic, but the training webinars during those initial few weeks were excellent and largely beneficial, according to participants in University A. Even after the "webinar training," many of us still required each other's support and assistance because it was frequently too much to take in and comprehend all at once. As a result, we still need to develop our creativity and become more "multimedia-rish. Some of us are afraid to admit that we don't know how to create our own YouTube videos or how to do voice-overs. Additionally, we have not attempted to take live, timed tests or exams; nevertheless, since they are marked for you, it must be our next learning endeavor. I just wanted to mention..."

"We were not ready at all, COVID-19 forced the shift into the multimodal teaching," participants from University B said. To become familiar with the applicable and useful platforms at our university that can be used, we had to set up crash courses. We found a number of capabilities that had been accessible but underutilized that we could use for remote instruction."

Participants at University C gave the following response: "No, our university did not have any online procedures in place, staff or student data, or, worse yet, laptops for students. First of all, we underestimated the length of time it would take and the severity of the epidemic. Students protested at the start of the lockdown to demand that the institution take social difficulties encountered by many into account and not prejudice anyone because we did not plan ahead for the social justice challenges faced by certain students. Additionally, we don't believe we were technically ready. Knowing that you won't be present in person to clarify any points that students may not understand, we frequently developed presentations for them."

Participants from University D gave the following response: "The majority of us, especially from historically underrepresented universities, were not making any effort to learn about teaching remotely. We were all hired to instruct in classrooms with students. In order to educate online, we needed new skill sets. As a result, I still need to improve in a number of areas."

Participants from Universities E, F, G, and H gave similar responses, saying that they were unprepared and that it was disappointing because the lockdown continued despite our expectations that it would last for a short while. We received e-learning seminars when we weren't ready to administer the online examinations, and we didn't realize there was too much knowledge and too much to apply at once. Although there were multiple training sessions, the task needed to be completed. During a previous strike, we caught a peek of pupils being prepared with care packages, but not quite enough. We quickly mastered the ability to think critically and creatively. We had some preparation, but not enough. Data and laptops were provided, and classes on using cutting-edge platforms like Microsoft Teams were held. However, psychologically, we weren't ready."

3.2. The second theme is the instructional methods used during COVID-19

The participants were asked to list the educational strategies they used during the course. The summary of their comments is provided below.

Participants from Universities A, B, and C gave similar responses, saying that we had used simplified language, provided student support, and repeated important ideas. This was because it was impossible

to tell from students' body language whether they had understood our presentation. Cooperative learning was promoted, and students were free to prepare and discuss certain themes. Critical pedagogy combines with culturally responsive pedagogy. Since every student was at home, the only thing we could consider was their social capital. We used PowerPoint presentations, announcements, letters to the kids, WhatsApp reminders, and other methods to reiterate instructions. We changed up the learning scenarios; sometimes we used a PPT with voiceover.

Likewise, participants from Universities D, E, and F described how they established WhatsApp groups for each course, where students could ask questions, receive answers, etc." Additionally, we requested student comments, both formally through the completion of evaluation or feedback forms as well as informally through the class reps. In the same way, we made sure that every student received their required textbooks regardless of where they were. Next, we choose a subset of the scheduled subjects and 25% of their content. Students were urged to interact on the available platforms while the instructional solutions were placed on Sakai two days later for them to review. Evaluations were also published online.

Participants from Universities G and H gave similar responses, saying that students would be free to use Sakai at any time when the majority of PowerPoint slides were placed there. In order for them to comprehend and adhere to the evaluation standards that were established for them, we distributed the work schedules for the modules. should explain to them the importance of participating in each activity that is assigned to them and the need for them to respect due dates. We had to upload the modules' softcopies as well as any required reading lists for individual modules.

3.3. The third theme is how COVID-19 affects education and learning

The responses of the participants regarding the effect of the COVID-19 on teaching and learning led to the development of this final theme. The responses are in the extracts.

Respondents in Universities A, B, C, and D also responded similarly: "It was difficult to teach and learn with students due to poor connectivity, lack of data, low participation, and poor attendance." Despite COVID-19, students are still facing problematic network connectivity, mobile data, and internet access due to a lack of adhering to the deadlines. Since most of our students live in remote areas where internet access is difficult, the network was the main challenge. Moreover, since it was the first day of the year, NSFAS students' allowance was not yet available, so some students were unable to participate due to their lack of computers or smartphones. Some pupils were not only extremely dependent and demanding, but also nasty, claiming that they were being punished because of their actions."

Participants from Universities E, F, G, and H gave the following comparable responses: "COVID-19 severely impacted our teaching and teaching sessions because the majority of students who battled with internet connection, a lack of a proper study place, or family obligations did not maintain their academic progress. Due to this circumstance, students missed online classes and submitted homework late. Due to certain kids wanting the knowledge and others wanting our attention, we had to clarify one point more than once. Because we did not know about or notice the majority of their upsetting remarks, the teaching sessions were frequently disrupted. Additionally, several pupils didn't take their assignments

seriously. Since they attend lectures from home, several students once more behaved as though they were in Holliday. Because of this, they gave academic pursuits a lower priority and copied and pasted from their classmates and copied one other's work.

This study examined the degree of readiness, instructional strategies, and COVID-19'S effects on academics in the Faculty of Education at the chosen institutions in South Africa's three provinces. Due to the COVID-19's unexpected introduction, it was discovered that the majority of academics were neither academically nor psychologically equipped to embrace remote instruction. As a result, some academics tried implementing various instructional approaches to improve the unpleasant circumstance. However, it was also made clear that many academics encountered a great deal of difficulty in carrying out their teaching duties and other academic obligations. Due to weak network connections and a lack of information on the part of both the academics and the students, effective instruction by the academics was not always possible. Assignment submission and other academic commitment deadlines were missed for a variety of reasons. Most students did not take their academic responsibilities seriously as a result of the COVID-19 circumstance, which distorted efficient teaching and learning.

These results are consistent with those of comparable research conducted in other parts of the world. Due to rising prices for energy and internet, COVID-19 resulted in lower work motivation, which had a detrimental influence on effective teaching and learning (Putri et al., 2020). Effective teaching and learning at many educational levels were disrupted in a positive way by the COVID-19 condition Rajhans et al. (2020). According to Rameez et al. (2020), COVID-19 presented various difficulties for university education in terms of online delivery, evaluation, and examination, as well as in managing projects, theses, and dissertations and administering practical examinations in an online setting. COVID-19 decreased student participation in the classroom and interfered with learning possibilities (Hill & Fitzgerald, 2020). The COVID-19 issue had a negative effect on academics because they believed that preparing for an online teaching and learning environment required more work than planning for face-to-face delivery (Walker et al., 2020). COVID-19 had a profoundly damaging impact on the education sector (Agasisti & Soncin, 2021). Due to THE COVID-19'S detrimental effects on student learning, the majority of pupils experienced high levels of anxiety (Radmehr & Goodchild, 2021). Due to the lack of a methodology, online learning as a result of COVID-19 had a detrimental influence on teaching and learning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Day et al. (2021) showed that COVID-19 had a negative influence on efficient teaching and learning because many students lacked the necessary equipment for online instruction.

The findings of this study implicate effective teaching and learning in higher institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that without adequate preparation to embrace remote teaching and learning, effective teaching at higher institutions cannot be achieved. The results of this study may be limited in that the Google form interview method was used during data collection due to COVID-19's prohibition on in-person interactions. The study's use of an emailed Google form for interviews may have limited the applicability of the findings to all professors in faculties of education at the universities that were sampled. As a result, the researchers recommend conducting additional study using the face-to-face interview style in order to reproduce their findings. Based on the limitation of this study, the researcher suggested the replication of this study using face-to-face data collection method instead of the online mode. This will help to empirically validate the outcome of this research.

4. Conclusion

In this study, the impact of the COVID-19 on efficient teaching and learning in South African universities was qualitatively examined. Based on the research's findings, it was determined that a number of factors, including a bad network, a lack of comfortable workspaces, a lack of commitment on the part of the students, and others, had a negative impact on efficient teaching and learning in South African universities under the COVID-19 conditions. Therefore, the researcher suggested, among other things, that to ensure successful teaching and learning during the COVID-19 circumstance, a suitable plan should be put in place. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects, university students should receive proper instruction on how to learn from home. The study has made a significant addition to successful teaching and learning in higher education since it has demonstrated the effect of COVID-19, which was orchestrated by COVID-19, on these processes. As a result, the findings of this study will assist the South African government in putting in place the necessary framework for high-quality teaching and learning at universities both during and after the COVID-19 era.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

The development of this manuscript was initiated and completed by the author.

Data Availability Statement

Data for this research are at the custody of the researcher.

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