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## “THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY HAS ALWAYS BEEN PART OF THE PLAN FOR HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS” – EXPERTS ON TEACHING DURING COVID-19 AT UP LAW LECTURE

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### 1 1 Introduction

The day of 11 March 2020 marks a defining moment in the collective memory of the world. This is the day the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. Racing against time to contain a further spread of the virus and save lives, countries responded by putting in place stringent measures that had a disruptive effect on life as it was known before the outbreak, including on education in general. To salvage what was left of the academic programme for the first semester of 2020 and beyond, institutions of higher learning took an extraordinary step and migrated to emergency remote teaching (ERT) and learning. The argument undergirding this chapter is that, while the extraordinary measure was itself aimed at assisting in managing the disruptive effect occasioned by Covid-19 in the higher education sector, it in itself disrupted the 2020 academic project.

The retrospective will be presented in five parts. The first part will provide an overview of the state of disaster and its impact on teaching and learning in the higher education sector. The chapter will underscore the fact that given the rising daily infections and death rates internationally and locally, it was not going to be possible to continue with face-to-face teaching and learning as it existed before the pandemic without placing the lives both students and staff at risk. The second part will point out that, save for few exceptions, the regulatory framework in South Africa makes provision for institutions to be accredited to offer teaching and learning either by distance or on a face-to-face basis. In order to avert a legitimacy conundrum, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) intervened and granted permission to institutions to operate outside the parameters of what their accreditation credentials allow for. In the third part, the chapter will argue that the migration to the ERT placed students from less privileged backgrounds, particularly first year students, at a disadvantage. It is trite that for less privileged students, university infrastructure – such as accommodation, computer facilities with access to the internet and

the library – is pivotal to their learning. Moving them away from these resources was tantamount to setting this category of students up for failure. To conclude, the chapter will argue that in light of the unpredictable nature of both the human-made and natural disruptions, it is imperative for each institution of higher learning to up-skill staff to be au fait with teaching modes suitable for application when things are normal and in an emergency.

## 1 2 The state of disaster and its impact on teaching and learning in 2020

By the time the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global pandemic, most tertiary institutions in the Southern Hemisphere had barely commenced with their 2020 face-to-face academic programme.<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus reported at the time that about 118 000 cases in 114 countries were detected and that 4 291 people had lost their lives. The projection at the time was that there would be a rise in the number of cases, the number of deaths, and the number of affected countries. As images of the ravaging effects of the pandemic around the globe were beamed on the cable networks, it was clear that something needed to be done, and be done urgently. In this regard, the World Health Organization called on countries to “activate and scale up” their emergency response mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Most countries, including South Africa, responded by going into a total shutdown mode.<sup>3</sup>

On 15 March 2020, empowered by s 3 of Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, declared a national state of disaster in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> On the same day, President Ramaphosa indicated in an address to the nation that the world infection rates had moved to

- 1 For South Africa, see Menon and Motala “Pandemic Leadership in Higher Education: New Horizons, Risks and Complexities” 2021 *Education as Change* 1.
- 2 WHO “Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on Covid-19 - 11 March 2020” 2020-03-11 <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--11-march-2020> (last accessed 2022-03-12).
- 3 Shiraef “Closed Borders, Travel Bans and Halted Immigration: 5 Ways Covid-19 Changed How – And Where – People Move Around The World” *The Conversation* 2021-03-18 <https://theconversation.com/closed-borders-travel-bans-and-halted-immigration-5-ways-covid-19-changed-how-and-where-people-move-around-the-world-157040> (last accessed 2022-03-12).
- 4 Department of Co-operative Government and Traditional Affairs “Declaration of a National State of Disaster” GG43096 of 15 March 2020 [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202003/43096gon313.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202003/43096gon313.pdf).

more than 162 000 people who have tested positive for the Coronavirus across the globe.<sup>5</sup> At the time, South Africa only had 61 confirmed cases. President Ramaphosa went on to announce that the scale and the speed at which the virus was spreading was “unprecedented and urgent” and decisive measures had to be put in place.<sup>6</sup>

When the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, made an announcement on measures for the higher education sector, there was a sense of urgency. On the same day, he announced that all post-school institutions were to close early with effect from the next day, but research and postgraduate work would continue.<sup>7</sup> Despite there being a sense of optimism that things would normalise and institutions return to normalcy after the Easter break, the Minister went on to state that: “Institutions will, however, be utilising this break period to identify and explore digital and online methodologies for teaching and learning that may need to be put in place to support the academic programme at a later stage.”<sup>8</sup> The Minister went on to say that, the decision by institutions would be based on scientific evidence and institutional considerations. Universities such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal had already set up a campus health war room. As UKZN Vice-chancellor and Principal Prof Nana Poku explained at the time, the university was “instituting large-scale, high-level surveillance, prevention and response measures to make sure that we are ready when Covid-19 is detected in our vicinity”.<sup>9</sup>

By the time President Ramaphosa addressed the nation again on 23 March 2020, there were more than 340 000 confirmed cases in the world. In South Africa, as the President reported, the number of confirmed cases had increased six-fold in just eight days from 61 cases to 402. With effect from midnight 26 March 2020, President Ramaphosa announced

5 South African Government “President Cyril Ramaphosa: Measures to Combat Coronavirus Covid-19 Epidemic” 2020-03-15 <https://www.gov.za/speeches/state-ment-president-cyril-ramaphosa-measures-combat-covid-19-epidemic-15-mar-2020-0000> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

6 As above.

7 South African Government “Minister Blade Nzimande: Measures to Deal with the Coronavirus Covid-19 in the Post-School Education and Training Sector” 2020-03-17 <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-higher-education-science-and-innovation-statement-measures-deal-covid-19-threat> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

8 As above.

9 Nair “UKZN Launches Ground Breaking War Room to Fight Coronavirus” *Sowetan* 2020-03-20 <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-03-03-ukzn-launches-groundbreaking-war-room-to-fight-coronavirus/> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

a lockdown.<sup>10</sup> Universities, along with all other institutions of higher learning, had to close down, and students had to vacate the university residences and return to their homes. On 9 April 2020, the infection rates had sky rocketed. There were more than 1.5 million confirmed cases worldwide, and 90 000 people across the world had succumbed to the virus. In South Africa, the infection rate was at 1 934.<sup>11</sup> As the nationwide lockdown was extended by a further two weeks, prospects of returning to campus to continue with teaching and learning as it existed before 11 March 2020 became a remote possibility. The world was thrust into unprecedented times, and so was teaching and learning. For the higher education sector, a balance had to be struck between saving lives and saving the academic year.<sup>12</sup>

To salvage what was left of the academic programme for the first semester of 2020, and beyond, while at the same time saving lives, institutions of higher learning took an extraordinary measure and migrated to an ERT, learning and assessment mode.<sup>13</sup> The core features of ERT, learning and assessment is that it is a temporary “stopgap”<sup>14</sup> measure, implemented in haste under an emergency. As such, it has no sound pedagogy to rely upon. According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE),<sup>15</sup> ERT, learning and assessment is defined as a:

temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode as a response to crisis situations. ERT involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-

- 10 Department of International Relations and Cooperation “Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on Escalation of Measures to Combat Covid-19 Epidemic” 2020-03-23 <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2020/cram0323.pdf> (last accessed 2022-03-12).
- 11 South African Government “President Cyril Ramaphosa: Extension of Coronavirus Covid-19 Lockdown to the End of April” 2020-04-09 <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-extension-coronavirus-covid-19-lockdown-end-april-9-apr-2020-0000> (last accessed 2022-03-12).
- 12 Parliamentary Monitoring Group “Saving the 2020 Academic Year: DHET, USAf, SAUS, SAFETSA, Deputy Minister” 2020-06-24 <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/30530/> (last accessed 2022-03-12).
- 13 This was not a uniquely South African approach; it was approach adopted internationally. See the DHET “Commonwealth of Learning Guidelines on Distance Education during Covid-19” [https://www.dhet.gov.za/SiteAssets/Guidelines%20on%20DE\\_Covid%2019.pdf](https://www.dhet.gov.za/SiteAssets/Guidelines%20on%20DE_Covid%2019.pdf) (last accessed 2022-03-12).
- 14 Czerniewicz, Trotter and Haupt “Online Teaching in Response to Student Protests and Campus Shutdowns: Academics’ Perspectives” 2019 *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 3.
- 15 The CHE is statutory body established in terms of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, as amended. Its work is also governed by the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008, as amended.

to-face or as blended or hybrid courses. ERT signals the use of a different form of transmission mode than contact classes but indicates that an online pedagogy has most likely not been adopted. ERT is based on the understanding that there would be a return to the normal contact-mode teaching and learning once the crisis is under control, and a safe return to classes possible.<sup>16</sup>

As the virus continued to change its trajectory by mutating,<sup>17</sup> President Ramaphosa announced the different risk levels accordingly. The five alert levels are as follows.<sup>18</sup> Alert level five is where drastic measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives are implemented. Alert level four is where extreme precautions are taken to limit community transmissions and outbreaks are taken, while allowing some form of activity to resume. Under alert level three, restrictions are placed on activities, including workplace and social events to prevent high risk of transmission. Under alert level two, physical restrictions on leisure and social activities are imposed to prevent a resurgence of the virus. Under alert level one, an allowance is made for normal activity to resume with precaution.

On 8 June 2020, Minister Nzimande, empowered by the Disaster Management Act issued Directions for Criteria to Return to Public University and Private Higher Education Campuses as Part of a Risk-Adjusted Strategy for a Phased-in Return from Level 3.<sup>19</sup> The *Government Gazette*,<sup>20</sup> outlined the strict processes to manage a phased-in return of staff and students to campus in line with the risk-adjusted levels announced by President Ramaphosa. With a clear understanding that campus institutional facilities would first be prepared in line with the Covid-19 regulations, the *Government Gazette* allowed for the following: under level four, final year students in programmes that require clinical training were allowed to return, starting with medicine (MBChB) and phasing-in of all other programmes. For level three, an allowance was made for the return of a maximum of 33 % of the students, and the criteria was

16 CHE 2020.

17 Bollinger, Maragakis and Ray “Covid Variants: What You Should Know” Johns Hopkins Medicine 2022-04-08 <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/a-new-strain-of-coronavirus-what-you-should-know> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

18 South African Government “About Alert System” <https://www.gov.za/covid-19/about/about-alert-system> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

19 Department of Higher Education “Directions for Criteria to Return to Public University and Private Higher Education Institution Campuses as Part of a Risk-Adjusted Strategy for a Phased-In Return From Level 3: Issued In terms of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002)” GG43414 of 8 June 2020 [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202006/43414gon652.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202006/43414gon652.pdf).

20 As above 7–9.

limited to final year students on path to graduating at the end of 2020, all years that require clinical training and postgraduate students who require laboratory equipment and other technical equipment. Level two allowed for the return of all years of study who require laboratory and technical equipment to complete the academic year, all years of study who require practical placements, experiential learning, work place based learning to complete the academic year and first year students in all programmes. Level one allowed for 100 % of the student population to return to campus. The expectation through the levels was that all other categories that were not invited back to campus would continue to receive support through the remote, multimodal teaching, learning and assessment until they could return to campus.

For institutions such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal, even under alert level one, the return of students to campus did not mean that there would be face-to-face lectures. The return accommodated students whose home environment was less conducive to study or who had connectivity challenges back home, to be brought to a relatively conducive environment with a stable internet connection. While it was safe for those students who needed laboratory facilities and clinical experience, for the rest of the students on campus, teaching and learning continued to be conducted remotely and online.

### **1 3 Teaching remotely and how the accreditation conundrum was averted**

Though universities enjoy a relative measure of autonomy and are at liberty to craft policies to suit their needs, teaching and learning takes place within parameters set by the CHE and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).<sup>21</sup> Under the auspices of Universities South Africa (USAf), universities band together “to promote a more inclusive, responsive and equitable national system of higher education”.<sup>22</sup> Institutionally, the regulatory framework provides certainty and predictability, and on a human level, it provides assurance to staff and students. In this regard, the conceptualisation, design and review of any programme must do so mindful of, among others, the mode of teaching and learning applicable to the individual institution concerned. Any changes to any approved programme or qualification has to comply with the set processes and procedures designed to guide such changes and, depending on the contemplated change, go through a number of approval

21 This is the government department whose mandate is to oversee post-school education and training.

22 Universities South Africa <https://www.usaf.ac.za/> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

structures within a given institution. From an audit and quality assurance perspective, policies, procedures and processes are indispensable.

Barring a few exceptions, South Africa clearly distinguishes between contact institutions where teaching and learning takes place in person, and those offering education by distance. With the exception of the University of South Africa (Unisa), which is an open distance and e-learning (ODEL) institution, all the public universities in South Africa are contact universities. One of the aspects the CHE scrutinises when granting accreditation is whether the proposed qualification or programme is aligned with the mission of the institution, the programme type, the mode of delivery and the profile of the targeted students.<sup>23</sup> Historically, the ODeL mode of teaching and learning has been accessible to students who – due to work commitments, personal circumstances or preference – were not able to avail themselves to attend contact sessions as per the requirements of a face-to-face institution. On the other hand, enrolling at a contact university came with an expectation that a student would participate in campus-based activities such as attending lectures and undertaking venue-based and invigilated assessments.

From a regulatory perspective, the first fundamental impact brought about by the migration to an online platform under ERT and learning (ERTL) was the blurring of the traditional divide between institutions accredited to offer face-to-face teaching and learning and those doing so by distance. The blurring of the divide created a potential regulatory conundrum. On 17 April 2020, the CHE issued a letter to all public and private institutions of higher learning, stating among other things that:

The restrictions on all programmes accredited for contact delivery are lifted. All the programmes accredited by the CHE for contact only can also be offered, supported and assessed through virtual and online delivery and blended learning approaches.<sup>24</sup>

In June 2020, in the “Quality Assurance Guidelines for Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning and Assessment during the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020”, the CHE went on to say that while the blanket approval was not ideal, it was necessary and must be accepted for the current conditions.<sup>25</sup>

23 Criteria for Programme Accreditation (revised in 2012) 5. [http://nr-online.che.ac.za/html\\_documents/CHE\\_Programme\\_Accreditation\\_Criteria\\_Revised\\_2012.pdf](http://nr-online.che.ac.za/html_documents/CHE_Programme_Accreditation_Criteria_Revised_2012.pdf) (last accessed 2022-03-12).

24 A copy is on file with the author.

25 CHE 2020.

Freed from the constraints of being either a face-to-face institution or one offering education by distance, institutions had a *carte blanche*, the only remaining constraint being the fact that the country was in a state of disaster. In a less than ideal environment, the ERT, learning and assessment had to take place remotely and on an online platform. According to Charles Hodges, Stephanie Moore, Barbara Lockee, Torrey Trust and Mark Bond, an online environment has its own benefits, such as the flexibility of teaching and learning anywhere and anytime, but the concern of these authors is that the speed with which this move was expected to take place “is unprecedented and staggering”.<sup>26</sup> Thrust into an unknown space, academics, like a novice learning how to play a piano in front of a paying audience, had to up-skill themselves in haste while at the same time saving the academic year.

## 1 4 Emergency remote teaching and socio-economic realities

South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world.<sup>27</sup> The post-school sector accounts for about 2,5 million students and staff.<sup>28</sup> Institutions of higher learning are a microcosm of the South African population and its challenges. To date, there continues to be a clear divide in terms of resources between historically white institutions and historically Black ones. In this regard, Kirti Menon and Shireen Motala note that:

Because historically white universities had the existing infrastructure, reserves and networks that allowed for greater access to resources, historically black and newly formed comprehensive universities tended to lag behind and be far more dependent on state subsidies than their wealthier counterparts.<sup>29</sup>

Generally, institutions of higher learning derive their main source of income from government funding and tuition fees from students. The year

26 Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond “The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning” 2020-03-27 *Educause Review* <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning> (last accessed 2022-03-17).

27 Stats SA “How Unequal is South Africa?” [https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12930&gclid=Cj0KCQjwjN-SBhCkARIsACsrBz6tR4BkH1nqqh2JiUy2P\\_W8hxm5MPGmA0hhK-X1eczFLXkJ8qvMmY0aAu0DEALw\\_wcB](https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12930&gclid=Cj0KCQjwjN-SBhCkARIsACsrBz6tR4BkH1nqqh2JiUy2P_W8hxm5MPGmA0hhK-X1eczFLXkJ8qvMmY0aAu0DEALw_wcB) (last accessed 2022-03-17).

28 South African Government “Minister Blade Nzimande: Measures to Deal with the Coronavirus Covid-19 in the Post-School Education and Training Sector” 2020-03-17 <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-higher-education-science-and-innovation-statement-measures-deal-covid-19-threat> (last accessed 2022-03-12).

29 Menon and Motala 2021 *Education as Change* 4.

2020 saw an increase in government funding, but this happened against the backdrop of decreases in the collection of fees by most institutions.<sup>30</sup>

While some of the students at residential institutions live in residences during the terms because they come from far-flung areas, others do so because they come from backgrounds that are not conducive to learning.<sup>31</sup> For the latter group of students, an institution of higher learning provides an environment that is relatively conducive to learning and the infrastructure and resources – such as computer facilities with access to the internet, the library and recreational facilities – they need to learn. In addition, the institution provides them with accommodation. The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande aptly observes that, “The majority of public universities and some public TVET colleges are not just teaching and learning spaces, but are also living spaces, which include student residences and staff housing”.<sup>32</sup>

Whether conducted on a face-to-face or online basis, teaching and learning requires the necessary infrastructure. The face-to-face mode of teaching and learning with a genealogy that goes as far back as to the time of the Academy of Plato around 387 BC in Athens, has always taken place within the “traditional brick and mortar” structures.<sup>33</sup> With the evolution of society, different facilities and aiding tools were added to create an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Appropriate infrastructure is an important consideration for the regulatory body. In this regard, the CHE will not accredit a contact programme until it has satisfied itself of, among others, the existence of suitable and sufficient infrastructure such as adequate venues to support the proposed programme.<sup>34</sup> Some institutions, when teaching and learning migrated to ERT, learning and assessment, migrated to a space with no resources to

30 Stats SA “A Decline in Tuition Fees Dents Higher Education Revenue” <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14860> (last accessed 2022-03-17).

31 Jili, Ede and Masuku “Emergency Remote Teaching in Higher Education During Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities” 2021 *International Journal of Higher Education* 6.

32 South African Government “Minister Blade Nzimande: Measures to Deal with the Coronavirus Covid-19 in the Post-School Education and Training Sector” 2020-03-17 <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-higher-education-science-and-innovation-statement-measures-deal-covid-19-threat> (last accessed 22-03-17).

33 Singh, Steel and Singh “Combining the Best of Online and Face-to-Face Learning: Hybrid and Blended Learning Approach for Covid-19, Post Vaccine, & Post-Pandemic World” 2021 *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* 142.

34 CHE “Criteria for Programme Accreditation (Revised in 2012)” 2012- 09-23 13. [http://nr-online.che.ac.za/html\\_documents/CHE\\_Programme\\_Accreditation\\_Criteria\\_Revised\\_2012.pdf](http://nr-online.che.ac.za/html_documents/CHE_Programme_Accreditation_Criteria_Revised_2012.pdf) (last accessed 2022-03-17).

their name. The starting point for some of the institutions was to first equip staff and students, accordingly.<sup>35</sup>

Operationally, face-to-face teaching revolves around the lecturer, who plays the role of the instructor, while students are only receptors.<sup>36</sup> Jitendra Singh, Keely Steel and Lovely Singh have argued that this mode of teaching and learning “provides in-person, real time interaction between faculty-students and student-student, which in turn can spark innovative questions and conversations”.<sup>37</sup> Further, it provides students with an opportunity to seek clarification or response to their questions in the classroom. Abeer Okaz, on the other hand, writes that the face-to-face mode of teaching is passive and does not encourage students to engage critically with the information received.<sup>38</sup> Mindful of the socio-economic challenges in South Africa, this chapter asserts that the face-to-face environment has an added advantage in that it levels the societal inequalities by creating an equal platform for all the students, regardless of their unequal backgrounds. Once converged in a classroom environment, students have access to the same lecturer and the same lecture material on an equal basis. To the lecturer, the classroom environment provides an opportunity to assess, in real time, the level of comprehension of the students and their non-verbal communication.

A non-traditional mode of teaching and learning, which has gained traction in the last two centuries, is distance education or education by correspondence. In the distance mode of learning or learning by correspondence, teaching and learning takes place while the student and the instructor are not necessarily at the same place.<sup>39</sup> According to Thomas Miller and Frederick King, the two defining features of distance education are geographical location and time.<sup>40</sup> Unlike in a face-to-face context, where the lecturer directs the process of learning, in distance education, learning is self-directed. The core features of a self-directed process of

35 See Songca, Ndebele and Mbodila “Mitigating the Implications of Covid-19 on the Academic Project at Walter Sisulu University in South Africa: A Proposed Framework for Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning” 2021 *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 41–60.

36 Ananga and Biney “Comparing Face-To-Face and Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education” 2017 *MIER Journal of Educational Studies, Trends & Practices* 173.

37 Singh *et al* 2021 *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* 142.

38 Okaz “Integrating Blended Learning in Higher Education” 2015 *Social and Behavioral Sciences* 600.

39 Gunawardena and McIsaac “Distance Education” in Jonassen DH (ed) *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* (2008) 355.

40 Miller and King “Distance Education: Pedagogy and Best Practices in the New Millennium” 2003 *International Leadership in Education* 284.

learning are that it has “connotations of autonomy, independence, and isolation” and the student is able to continue with the task at hand with minimum assistance from the lecturer.<sup>41</sup> This mode of learning, being non-traditional, has attracted criticism. About this, Charlotte Gunawardena and Marina McIsaac write that:

correspondence study, which was designed to provide educational opportunities for those who were not among the elite and who could not afford full time residence at an educational institution, was looked down on as inferior education.<sup>42</sup>

Unisa, with its rich history dating back to 1873, has since 1946 been offering education exclusively by distance.<sup>43</sup> The Unisa model has historically been a source of solace to those who were disadvantaged by the apartheid system, including those in incarceration and those beyond the territorial borders of the Republic of South Africa.

Historically, both the face-to-face and distance education have been operating on two opposite ends of the spectrum with nothing common. The distance model relied on postal service to reach students, while students at a face-to-face institution had to converge at a designated place for their lectures. In distance education, learning has historically taken place asynchronously as both lecturers and students interact at different times.<sup>44</sup> Invariably, the pedagogical approaches guiding the two modes are also different. In preparing to have an in-person session with the students, a lecturer curates the material with a clear understanding that some gaps will be filled during the face-to-face session. Preparing for a distance session, on the other hand, is entirely different. The study material is curated in such a way that the student would be able to navigate their way through the material unaided by the lecturer. This mode of instruction is, by operation, less personal.<sup>45</sup>

Both the face-to-face and distance modes have experimented with the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning. For instance, the use

41 Brookfield “Self-Directed Learning: A Critical Review of Research” 1985 *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 7.

42 Gunawardena and McIsaac (2008) 355, 357.

43 Unisa “The leading ODL university” <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/About/The-leading-ODL-university> (last accessed 2022-03-17).

44 Littlefield “The Difference Between Synchronous and Asynchronous Distance Learning” *ThoughtCo* 2020-08-27 <https://www.thoughtco.com/synchronous-distance-learning-asynchronous-distance-learning-1097959> (last accessed 2022-03-17).

45 Songca *et al* 2021 *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 44.

of technology has made it possible for Unisa to transition from distance education to open distance e-learning (ODEL). According to Sindile Ngubane-Mokiwa and Moeketsi Letseka ODeL framework “is premised on the assumption that every student learning can be optimally supported by modern electronic technologies and other digital facilities”.<sup>46</sup> In the last decade, face-to-face institutions have gradually incorporated technology as they migrated towards a hybrid mode of learning, which is a blend of both face-to-face and online learning.<sup>47</sup> In a study focusing on the response to the use of technology by academics during times of protest, Laura Czerniewicz, Henry Trotter and Genevieve Haupt write that even though some of the academics had used engaged in blended learning at some level during the protests, “virtually all of them thought it was inferior pedagogically to a face-to-face mode of learning”.<sup>48</sup> The following reasons were given to support the claims made.<sup>49</sup> The first reason was premised on the conviction that students learn better through personal engagement with their peers and the lecturer. The second reason stemmed from a concern that an online environment creates a different set of accountabilities than the online environment. Thirdly, the respondents held the view that the students themselves did not like the online environment. Fourthly, the respondents were of the view that the online environment makes it difficult to give students personal attention and feedback. Lastly, some of the respondents reported a declining engagement and performance among students.

Firmly anchored in the face-to-face teaching mode, most institutions were still in the early stages of making use of the hybrid model. As such, when the migration to ERTL was announced, academics were at different levels of preparedness. It was to those who had an advanced level of this mode of learning that most institutions turned for tips and strategies on how to make optimal use of online tools, including on setting assessments.

## 1 5 **Aligning assessments with emergency remote teaching and learning**

According to Mfundo Masuku, Nokukhanya Jili and Primrose Sabela, assessment constitutes an indispensable process in teaching and learning.<sup>50</sup>

46 Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka “Shift From Open Distance Learning to Open Distance e-Learning” in Letseka (ed) *Open Distance Learning (ODL) in South Africa* (2015) 132.

47 Singh *et al* 2021 *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* 141.

48 Czerniewicz *et al* 2019 *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 10.

49 As above 10–11.

50 Masuku, Jili and Sabela “Assessment as a Pedagogy and Measuring Tool in Promoting

It is through assessment that one is able to check whether the module outcomes have been met and the theoretical and practical competencies achieved.<sup>51</sup> Though most academics had experimented with online platforms as an aside while mainly teaching face-to-face, very few made use of the online marking tools in a way that could assist in lessening online acts of dishonesty.<sup>52</sup> As a constituent component of teaching and learning, assessments in 2020 also had to be adapted in line with the ERT mode. In this regard, the CHE advised that:

The final summative assessment strategies for modules should be evaluated by academics for suitability under emergency remote teaching and learning conditions, and changes to assessment strategies and plans should be recorded on a module-by-module basis.<sup>53</sup>

With in-person assessments no longer an option, universities resorted to remote online assessments. The one point of concern, though, was securing the integrity of the assessment process. Over the years, face-to-face teaching relied on students converging at a central place and undertaking their assessments in the presence of invigilators who had to, among others satisfy themselves of the identity of the person taking the particular assessment and also of the fact that the student did not have an unfair advantage over others by referring to unauthorised material. Even under the watchful eye of the invigilators, institutions of higher learning continued to experience acts of dishonesty such as cheating.

The migration to ERTL opened up the assessment process to other forms of dishonesty. Olivia Holden, Meghan Norris and Valerie Kuhlmeier outline some of the possible acts of dishonesty on an online platform as: students downloading papers from the internet and claiming them as to be their own work, using materials without permission during an online exam, communicating with other students through the internet to obtain answers, or having another person complete an online exam or assignment rather than the student who is submitting the work.<sup>54</sup> With assessments taking place remotely, it became impossible to account for

Deep Learning in Institutions of Higher Learning” 2020 *International Journal of Higher Education* 274.

51 As above 275.

52 Khan, Sivasubramaniam, Anand and Hysaj “‘e’-Thinking Teaching and Assessment to Uphold Academic Integrity: Lessons Learnt From Emergency Distance Learning” 2021 *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 7.

53 CHE 2020.

54 Holden, Norris and Kuhlmeier “Academic Integrity in Online Assessment” 2021 *Research Review Frontiers in Education* 2.

the identity of the person taking the assessment, particularly in the era of contract cheating or ghost writing. In jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom,<sup>55</sup> and Australia,<sup>56</sup> cases of contract cheating or ghost writing – when a student actively looks for a third party to complete an assessment for them at a fee – had already spiked.

The online platform provides a number of tools to assist in securing the integrity of assessments. The available tools are able to detect and help prevent cheating online.<sup>57</sup> Given the socio-economic challenges experienced by most institutions of higher learning, in South Africa, procuring proctoring tools, as Anne Verhoef and Yolandi Coetser aptly observe, may not be an affordable option. In addition to the issue of costs, the two authors point out that proctoring tools create a policing environment where students are under surveillance, thus raising some privacy concerns. Some of the proctoring tools have also raised concerns regarding racial biases.<sup>58</sup>

With virtually no proctoring tools to rely on to secure the integrity of the assessments, the lot fell on academics to be creative in setting their assessment questions. As Zeenath Khan, Shivadas Sivasubramaniam, Pranit Anand and Ajrina Hysaj point out, academics opted to either set randomised multiple choice questions or questions that required knowledge application as opposed to knowledge reproduction.<sup>59</sup> A further challenge to navigate was the loadshedding schedule. Power outages were widespread during 2020.<sup>60</sup> With students scattered across the country, it became difficult for academics to manage the assessment process, particularly timed assessments and multiple-question formats, even if the latter were randomised. To ensure the integrity of the assessment process and that no student was left behind,<sup>61</sup> some modules set up to three different assessments per session.

55 Newton “How Common Is Commercial Contract Cheating in Higher Education and Is It Increasing? A Systematic Review” 2018 *Frontiers in Education* 1–18.

56 Bretag, Harper, Burton, Ellis, Newton, Van Haeringen, Saddiqui and Rozenberg “Contract Cheating and Assessment Design: Exploring the Relationship” 2019 *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 676–691.

57 Holden *et al* 2021 *Frontiers in Education* 1–13.

58 Verhoef and Coetser “Academic Integrity of University Students During Emergency Remote Online Assessment: An Exploration of Student Voices” 2021 *Transformation in Higher Education* 8–9.

59 Khan *et al* 2021 *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 7.

60 Staff Writer “Load Shedding in 2020 has Been the Worst on Record: Graph” *BusinessTech* 2020-09-03 <https://businesstech.co.za/news/energy/431102/loadshedding-in-2020-has-been-the-worst-on-record-graph/> (last accessed 2022-04-01).

61 SA News “Higher Education Vows to Leave no Student Behind” 2020-04-20 <https://>

## 1 6 Some valuable lessons for the future

Most industries are familiar with the concept of planning for emergencies. For instance, in the aviation world, it is a standard feature for every aircraft to have emergency measures in place, which will be used in an event of an emergency. Upon boarding, passengers receive an elaborate explanation of what they will be expected to do or refrain from doing, should an emergency arise. In addition, there are simple documents to read to this effect. The education sector is not immune to emergencies, and there will be times when education will have to continue under an emergency. According to Nhlanhla Landa, Sindiso Zhou and Newlin Marongwe, the concept of education in emergencies “generally refers to war-torn countries, regions hit by natural disasters and political and war refugees living in refugee camps”.<sup>62</sup> When it becomes humanly impossible to continue with face-to-face education, some jurisdictions – such as in Syria during the conflict, the United States of America during Hurricane Katrina and New Zealand during the Christchurch earthquake – have had to rely on technology as a stopgap measure to continue with teaching and learning.<sup>63</sup> South Africa has experienced a fair share of disruptions occasioned by protests. During the nationwide student protests that started in 2015, some universities responded by migrating the teaching and learning programme to an online platform as a stopgap measure.<sup>64</sup> Since then, some institutions have on a sporadic basis encountered disruptions that brought teaching and learning to a halt, but not to the same degree and scale as it happened in 2020. Faced with a *force majeure*<sup>65</sup> the nature of the situation was such that the transition to ERT, learning and assessment had to take place with immediate effect. Leaving nothing to chance, education administrators asked for all hands on deck as teaching and learning became a national project. In this regard, there was a well-coordinated synergy between entities in the higher echelons of power responsible for the higher education sector. The private sector also took an interest in ensuring the success of the academic year. In this regard, the Internet Service Providers’ Association of South Africa zero-rated some of its websites.<sup>66</sup>

[www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/higher-education-vows-leave-no-student-behind](http://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/higher-education-vows-leave-no-student-behind) (last accessed 2022-04-01).

62 Landa, Zhou and Marongwe “Education in Emergencies: Lessons from Covid-19 in South Africa” 2021 *International Review of Education* 168.

63 Czerniewicz *et al* 2019 *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 6.

64 As above 1–22.

65 See Khan *et al* 2021 *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 24.

66 McKane “Here is the Full List of Zero-Rated Websites in South Africa” *My Broadband*

Institutions of learning are by nature competitive, and as such are inward looking. The introduction of ERTL saw institutions demolishing their silos and sharing information with other institutions. There was a sense of common purpose. In this regard, Prof. Sibongile Muthwa, in her capacity of the chairperson of Universities South Africa, remarked that:

It was the first time that our universities fully grasped, and put into practice, the importance of collaboration rather than competition. We have seen that as a system we do achieve far more by working together than by competing against one another. In 2020, we shared expertise, research infrastructure and other resources to provide input to the state and to bolster our fellow institutions. By engaging across functional teams to identify sector-wide solutions to common challenges, we also lessened the burden of anxiety and trauma among institutions.<sup>67</sup>

To facilitate a speedy implementation of ERTL, the CHE placed the accreditation requirement in abeyance, and institutions had to follow suit by relaxing their teaching and learning policies. Freed from the regulatory constraints, institutions and staff were encouraged to be innovative.

Finally, academics and students played an important role in implementing ERTL. The first year in-take of 2020 had hardly settled in at their respective institutions when they were asked to go back home and study from there. For universities that recruit mainly from quintiles 1-3,<sup>68</sup> the first-year cohort requires assistance as they integrate in a different environment with its challenges. However, in line with the announcement from Minister Nzimande, these students were only able to return to campus under alert level one, which only came into effect from 21 September to 28 December 2020.<sup>69</sup> In terms of the semester system, this meant these students had to struggle on their own for the first semester of their university experience.

<https://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/356371-here-is-the-full-list-of-zero-rated-websites-in-south-africa.html> (last accessed 2022-04-01).

- 67 Universities South Africa (USAf) *Annual Report 2020* file:///C:/Users/MnyonganiF/Documents/Research%20in%20General/Articles%20of%20Interest/Teaching%20Online%202021%20UP/USAf-Annual-Report-2020%20what%20we%20learnt.pdf (last accessed 2022-04-01).
- 68 See Department of Basic Education “Government Bridges Inequality Gap Through No-Fee School Policy” <https://www.education.gov.za/ArchivedDocuments/ArchivedArticles/Governmentbridgesinequalitygap.aspx> (last accessed 2022-04-16).
- 69 South African Government “Covid-19 / Novel Coronavirus” <https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus> (last accessed 2022-04-16).

Staff members, particularly academics, bore the brunt of it. Already in 2020, the CHE had anticipated that the migration to the ERTL would take a heavy toll on staff. In this regard, it advised that:

Academic staff workload allocations and performance agreements could be re-visited to account for the huge investment in time that they will be making to pivot to ERTL. Research output at individual level should be adjusted to account for the additional time academics will spend on developing ERT materials. A reduction in research outputs across the sector seems inevitable and should be anticipated.<sup>70</sup>

The jury is still out as to whether research output adjustments were implemented. With a myriad workshop to attend, volumes of documentation to go through, and their teaching material to prepare and assess, academics stayed the course. Like fish thrown out of water, academics had to learn how to stay alive in a different environment and still deliver the academic year, which they did.

## **1 7 Conclusion**

This chapter has reflected on events that led to the implementation of ERTL as an extraordinary measure in 2020. By its nature, ERTL is a stopgap measure and not a permanent feature. While the extraordinary measure was aimed at assisting in managing the disruptive effect of Covid-19 in the higher education sector, it also disrupted the 2020 academic project. The 2020 academic year was a difficult one for staff and students, but the burden was made lighter by the fact that those empowered to make decisions were hands-on and provided the necessary direction for each step. Notwithstanding the policy directives received, as implementers of the project at the coalface, academics had to fly by the seat of their pants to make teaching and learning a success in 2020.

