Are Lecturers Teaching and Students Learning in a Post-pandemic Environment:
A Case Study at a Business School in South Africa

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Abstract

Lecturers were confronted with so many changes and new technologies during the Covid-era that it was deemed of utmost important to analyse the different perspectives of lecturers within a Business School, in South Africa. The primary objective of the study was to determine to what extent teaching practices needed to change as well as to determine whether learning could be applied effectively in the working environment. It should be noted that Business Schools lecture students on a post-graduate level and the students already have working experience. Therefore, further soft skills development, based on strong ethical and sustainable values, were core when teaching this specific cohort of students. This case study will follow a qualitative approach within the Social-Constructivist paradigm based on the theory of Interpretivism. Interviews were held with experienced lecturers of a post-graduate programme. These interviews were analysed on Atlas TI to determine themes and sub-themes. It was recommended that more real-life simulations within group cohorts should be utilised. A further recommendation was that Quiltbot and other AI (artificial intelligence) devices impacts negatively on the learning process. Also, students' experiences in the work situation should be shared in the classroom as it impacts on a deeper understanding of the different roles of workers in the workplace which in turn enhances active learning. Implementation of the recommendations could introduce a new way of teaching in a more dynamic classroom environment.

1. Introduction

Lecturers were confronted with so many changes and new technologies during the Covid-era that it was deemed of utmost important to analyse the different perspectives of lecturers within a Business School, in South Africa. With all the ongoing changes, it seems that the teaching and learning environment also changes constantly. This is even more true when you are faced with a post-graduate group of students who comes from different backgrounds, working environments (if any), and worldviews. With all the available knowledge on Google, YouTube, and different Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, one needs to question not the quality of teaching, but rather if learning is still taking place in the post graduate classroom. Due to my observations, I realised that we need to look at more innovative teaching methods that will contribute to the learning process.

2. Problem Statement

COVID-19 has significantly altered societal norms, affecting communication patterns, teaching methodologies, virtual team management, and resource allocation (Sokolic, 2022:202). This transformation has also extended to the educational sector, with a notable shift towards online learning. This shift is not merely a temporary response to a crisis; instead, it is anticipated to shape the future of education by expanding access to learning opportunities. The transition to an online teaching and learning environment brings both advantages and challenges that impact both students and lecturers. While previous studies, such as those by Aboagye et al. (2020), have primarily focused on identifying challenges and assessing the effectiveness of online learning from the students' perspective, this study aims to delve deeper. Specifically, the focus will be on evaluating whether lecturers are effectively delivering instruction in this new paradigm and if students are genuinely benefiting from the learning experience.

3. Objectives

The study will address two primary objectives:
- Assessing the extent to which teaching practices have changed in response to the shift to a more online education environment.
- Investigating the effectiveness of learning within the modified teaching environment in the post-pandemic context.

This research seeks to provide valuable insights into the impact and dynamics of teaching and learning which will go beyond the traditional emphasis on challenges in order to explore the actual and real-life implementable teaching and learning experiences gained in the post-pandemic classroom.

4. Literature Review

The literature review aims to provide a contextual understanding of the research topic by exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on post-graduate education. Additionally, it delves into the transformation from a traditional teaching approach to a digital environment, with a focus on assessing its implications for lecturers to ensure that learning took place. The insights gained from this review will contribute to a deeper understanding of the objectives set forth in this study.

4.1 Overview of the Global Shift to Online Education in Response to the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for businesses worldwide, compelling various sectors, including business schools, to reevaluate their service delivery methods. The implementation of social distancing protocols rendered traditional classroom teaching obsolete, necessitating a swift adaptation by lecturers to new work methods that leverage technology. Lecturers were tasked with transferring teaching materials to an online context, prompting the redesign of assessments, the recording of lectures, and the facilitation of synchronous online seminars.

To facilitate this transition, lecturers embraced various online learning platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), MS Teams, Zoom, and Google Classroom (Sudirtha et al., as cited by Hashim et al., 2021). However, this shift was not without its challenges. Lecturers faced the complex task of ensuring that the most relevant content was uploaded to the appropriate digital platforms, tailored to carry specific file types for easy student access (Shava, 2022:359).

Even before the pandemic, business schools were actively engaged in digital transformation efforts, seeking innovative ways to enhance teaching and learning experiences to attract top students, teachers, and researchers. Despite these efforts, many developing countries faced significant obstacles in fully implementing online education, including a lack of experience, inadequate training, and limited resources for delivering online curricula (Sintema, as cited by Mbhiza, 2021).

Key barriers to successful online teaching among academics included reluctance to innovate and change teaching approaches, insufficient institutional support, and work overload (Senik & Broad, as cited by Watty et al., 2016). A critical challenge lay in academics' ability to embrace available technology, cultivating the right attitude and skills for effective use and application of online educational technologies to ensure effective learning (Watty et al., 2016:07).

Overcoming these challenges requires attention to organizational strategy, effective leadership, collaboration, and stakeholder involvement, as these factors are considered crucial for successful digital transformation and overcoming natural resistance to change (Robertson & Lapina, 2022:165).

4.2 Challenges Faced by Lecturers in Adapting to Digital Teaching Methods

4.2.1 Lack of Engagement

According to Mishra et al. (2020:06), lecturers noticed a lack of enthusiasm and attention from students during online classes, and most students are unaccustomed to online learning with smartphones and computers, which often creates a significant setback. However, Le et al. (2022:07) argue that many universities did not have a clear and consistent assessment policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, online participation was not assessed as part of student learning. Joshi et al. (2022:08) assert that lecturers who were used to relying on students' verbal and nonverbal clues during face-to-face classes to gauge students' understanding found it challenging. Mishra et al. (2020:06) further add that lecturers could not read students' faces and moods; thus, it is difficult to change the teaching pattern to suit the needs of the students. In addition, a lack of interaction leads to an inability to determine

learners' psychological and emotional needs and to identify learners' doubts (Rahayu and Wirza, cited by Kamal and Illiyan, 2021). Orhan and Beyhan (2020) further argue that students' lack of interaction contributes to teachers' stress and loss of focus during the teaching process.

4.2.2 Assessment and Academic Integrity

Assessment can be considered the most challenging part of the transition to online learning for an institution used to face-to-face oral or written exams, as the lack of control over the students makes it hardly possible to ensure that students are not using any unethical means (Thapaliya, 2023:45). Plagiarism is an issue of concern in online examination as educators are unable to verify the identity of each examination candidate. The most reported types of cheating are plagiarism and ghost-writing, followed by copying and communicating with others during assessments, with impersonation only occasionally observed. The leading causes of cheating are students' unwillingness to work hard, unclear policies, and poor course content or assessment questions (Mellar, 2018:15).

4.2.3 Workload and Poor Work-Life Balance

The COVID-19 quick transition to online teaching forced educators to re-assess learning objectives and rework large portions of their teaching to align it with the different needs of students. Creating pre-recorded materials contributes mainly to a high workload, which is much more complicated than just preparing and teaching slides. Assessments and marking also increased the educator's workload due to the shift to assessing higher-order learning. Also, the limited ability to observe students during synchronous sessions means that educators must develop new ways of gauging engagement and constantly monitor various inputs. Familiarising oneself with many new technologies and potential pedagogics that could be applied also added to academics' workload (Müller, 2021). Ahlers (cited by Cazan, 2020) adds that digitalisation affects the boundaries between working time and private life, as working with the Internet creates a high expectation that requests will be answered promptly.

4.2.4 Inadequate Professional Development

During COVID-19, educators struggled with technological literacy, which led to an inability to create quality videos and operate the online concept (Rasheed et al., cited by Le et al., 2022). Online education demands significant adaptation, support, preparation, and engagement. (Haleem et al., 2022). Lecturers need ongoing training, particularly with examples of best online teaching practices (González et al., 2023:63).

4.3 Technological Constraints

Mishra et al. (2020:06) argue that the major challenge of online teaching is an unstable network connection. Digital mishaps are also the biggest timewasters in the workplace. During the pandemic, poor technical support and technological infrastructure issues such as outdated audio and video systems, frequent disconnections in Wi-Fi communication, and limited bandwidth negatively affected the quality of work. Infrastructure, accessibility, inclusion, and digital resources are among the issues cited under technological constraints. These constraints influence students' access to online materials and impact how they participate in class and interact with the material (Lucas & Vicente 2022:5092).

5. Research Methodology

This case study adopts a qualitative approach within the Social-Constructivist paradigm, grounded in the theory of Interpretivism. This methodological choice allows for an in-depth exploration of the underlying problems and perceptions related to the experiences of lecturers during the transition from traditional classroom teaching to online instruction (Quinlan et al., 2019:127).

Population and Sampling

The study population comprises 13 lecturers actively involved in the program at the Business School. Inclusion criteria required participants to have prior experience with traditional classroom teaching and to have subsequently transitioned to online teaching in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure a targeted and focused sample, a purposive sampling strategy (non-probability sampling) was employed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected lecturers, providing the flexibility to probe deeper into discussions for a clearer understanding and emphasis on specific issues (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:91). Interview invitations were sent via email, and participants accepted the invitation by signing a consent form. Verbal interviews, conducted on Microsoft Teams, lasted between 30-50 minutes each. Data saturation, indicating that additional interviews would yield redundant information, was reached after 8 interviews. To safeguard participant confidentiality, recordings of the interviews were securely stored in a password-protected file. The analysis of these interviews was performed using Atlas.ti software to identify and categorize themes and sub-themes, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive exploration of the collected data.

6. Thematic Analysis

After completing the coding process, three main themes emerged as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Teaching delivery changes	Facilitation methods Redefined assessments Technology integration
Perception of quality of education	Teaching competencies and skills Interaction dynamics Plagiarism Poor assessment methods
Effective online teaching practices	Periodic scheduled face-to-face classes Practice engaging and diverse activities Self-development Prior class preparation

6.1 Theme 1: Teaching Delivery Changes

The changes that took place during and after Covid-19, could have an effect on teaching and learning. This theme indicated that delivery changes could have an impact on how lecturers teach and an even greater impact on learning. The sub-themes that emerged were the shift in facilitation methods, redefined assessments, and technology integration.

6.1.1 Facilitation Methods

During Covid-19, all education institutions transformed to some extent. Teaching, assessment, feedback to students, group work, etc had to adapt to an online platform (Mishra et al., 2020). The sudden change forced academics to adapt and to convert teaching methods to an online format. They also adapted to utilising various digital tools to maintain teaching content delivery and to promote student interaction, enhancing their knowledge of course designing and assessment (González et al., 2023:55).

> "I explained the PowerPoints using voiceovers, For the teaching design, I brought in some other things like case studies." (Participant P)

> "We were teaching on Zoom then, and we also had to make recordings, narratives of our PowerPoint presentations." (Participant R)

> "I had to learn new methods of uploading lessons, class activities, class assessments, even the exam." (Participant T)

6.1.2 Redefined Assessments

Participants mentioned that the assessment strategy changed to suit the online environment. Informal assessment, portfolio of evidence, online quizzes, and case studies were adopted. Guàrdia et al. (cited by Adama et al., 2023) mentioned various assessment methods, including essay questions, video recording presentations, and real-world scenarios assessments.

However, participants of this study further revealed that it was challenging to ensure that the assessments were fair and effective. They questioned whether it was on the same standard as in in-person assessments. In a study conducted by Almossa and Alzahrani (2022:9), the participants also found it difficult to create reliable alternative assessment tasks due to the limited time available to prepare and conduct the assessment tasks. Participants also indicated that the lack of time to sufficiently prepare for the new method of assessment contributed further to this to this challenge.

> "The assessments changed that went fully online. And that was quite a challenge to get the tests and quizzes under the knee to see what was built in there." (Participant P)

> "The assessments moved from traditional assessment of pen and paper to continuous assessment, and then to short assessments because the online platform was not convenient for assessment of almost two to three hours." (Participant G)

6.1.3 Technology Integration

According to the participants, the move to online platforms was sudden, and there was little time for academics to prepare. Thus, they could not use the full potential of the available online platforms, but as they became familiar with the technology, they discovered new functions that imitated the traditional classroom environment, such as the use of digital whiteboards. Furthermore, Zoom and chat meetings facilitated planning, collaboration and instruction. García-Morales et al. (2021) mentioned that tools such as Skype, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, email, WhatsApp, and Telegram, were used to maintain contact with students. These tools were also used for workgroups, supervising practical activities, evaluating, and tutoring students, recording explanations etc.

> "First of all, it was a quick decision to use technology and to make that transition. I do not think the academic staff were fully prepared for that, but it is a question of adapt or die." (Participant R)

> "We had to look for software that we could use to create clear recordings and prepare smooth presentation." "Now you have to think of innovative ways, and innovative way of asking questions." (Participant G)

> "We had a lot of Zoom meetings, a couple of chat meetings." (Participant J)

6.2 Theme 2: Perception of Quality in Education

Keeping the title in mind, the next set off questions focussed on the perception of students in an online environment. When lecturers were asked to share their perception on their perceptions of effective online teaching practices as compared to traditional classroom teaching, their responses yielded four sub-themes, viz., teaching competencies and skills, interaction dynamics, plagiarism and poor assessment methods.

6.2.1 Teaching Competencies and Skill

Some participants believed that the quality of teaching solely depends on the lecturers' skills and experience rather than the mode of delivery. Oliva-Córdova et al. (2021) ascertain that efficient online practice application depends on educators' pedagogical and technological competencies. The findings of this study further indicate that a key factor is the educators' capacity to adapt to various learning environments. Certain lecturers found the online setting difficult, particularly those who value in-person communication. However, some educators can function well in an online and a face-to-face (traditional) environment. According to the participants, their views were that when lecturers are flexible, the quality of their teaching remains consistent.

> "The quality of teaching is inherent to the lecture. Whether you're doing it online or face-to-face, if you have the skills of engaging the people, facilitating, then it doesn't affect you." (Participant S)

> "I don't think the quality of teaching is compromised at all. I think a person can do it if they are good at what they do at teaching. It doesn't matter whether it's online or face-to-face. I want to think that the quality of teaching is still the same, and

depending on who renders what. And I'll say why, some lectures do have difficulty to adopt to online environment." (Participant B)

"But I think it depends on the approach of the lecturer. If you just share theories with people and they don't apply it and they don't reflect, then it's worthless." (Participant R)

6.2.2 Interaction Dynamics

The participants emphasised that interaction plays a major role on teaching quality. Online teaching has some limitations, as it reduces physical interaction between the students and the lecturer, and these challenges impact negatively on classroom communication, engagement, and assessment. Smaller classroom groups can be considered as an option to mitigate this. However, it is not cost-effective. Jaggars et al. (2013) (cited by Singh and Matthees. 2022) add that interpersonal interaction between students and lecturers may improve students' academic performance on class activities and assignments. Students whose lecturers had little interaction with the class had lower grades when compared to classes where the educators interacted with students regularly (Participant D).

"During contact that discussions and that laughter and stuff that you have inside a classroom bring more, much more. It's an add-on to what we already had." (P2)

"You cannot under value human interaction on face-to-face. It is the most effective communication and knowledge sharing platform." "With online, you can't see whether they are learning." (Participant K)

"I don't think lecturers will compromise on quality at any given time. What is compromised is the quality on the feedback, direct feedback." (Participant N)

6.2.3 Plagiarism

The findings raise concerns regarding the validity of assessments in an online learning environment. There have been claims that students are using consultants to complete assignments on their behalf. Multiple choice questions are also said to compromise the security of assessments. Plagiarism has been made worse by the ease with which information and resources can be accessed online and by technological advancements in AI. No adequate resources are available to track and validate student work efficiently. Selelo (2021) postulates that, in an online learning environment, students are always free to consult any material or resources that could assist them in passing their academic assessments. Plagiarism undermines and compromises the quality of education.

"There is allegation is that some of the students use consultants to do their assignments." (Participant R)

"I think plagiarism it's going to be a bigger problem in future because of the online environment and artificial intelligence." (Participant R)

"Looking at the integrity, whether the student is cheating and all those things, yes, at some point because we haven't got the resources that would monitor to such a level

that we are confident that the students are doing the job by themselves." (Participant G)

6.2.4 Poor Assessment Methods

The participants emphasise that multiple choice assessments may not adequately assess the student's critical thinking, complex, and analytical skills suitable for a postgraduate level. According to Arend (2009), unfamiliar teaching methods and techniques in online environments can cause even more uncertainty about the best methods for encouraging critical thinking.

> "The online assessment, it mostly focuses multiple choice, those types of assessment, they are okay, suitable for first year students. But now when you move to postgrad it becomes a problem." (Participant 9)

Participants were further concerned that students in an online environment won't have enough opportunities to practice and improve the skills such as discussions and debating, which are skills mostly developed through direct or physical interaction with peers and instructors.

> "It's a problem. At the end of the day, they can't even speak. They can't even discuss. They can't even have an argument. They don't even understand what they are doing because with this online thing." (Participant J)

6.3 Theme 3: Effective Online Teaching Practices

In order to ensure that quality teaching takes place, a set of questions dealt with the effectiveness on teaching practices. This theme comprised of sub-themes, viz., periodic scheduled face-to-face classes, engaging in diverse activities, self- development and prior class preparation.

6.3.1 Periodic Scheduled Face-to-Face Classes

The participants mentioned that incorporating scheduled face-to-face sessions into an online model will assist in creating a more engaging, dynamic and effective educational experience and foster a sense of belonging among students. According to the participants, this approach will provide students a platform to meet and share experiences, often lacking in an online setting. This also assists in familiarising students with the digital tools they will be using, which can help mitigate challenges and confusion once the course begins. Heng and Sol (2020) state that lecturers should host welcoming forums to enhance interaction and relationship building for a successful online education.

> "I think we need some specifically scheduled face-to-face sessions. We need some official networking opportunities for the students, where we give them the opportunity to meet other people, to share their experiences. The first recommendation I can think of is you should coach and guide your students very well before you start. They must know what to expect and what not to expect." (Participant D)

> "If there was a way that they could have one contact session, maybe a month or so before lessons begin, where they can be taught how to operate efundi." (Participant T)

"you've got to have a very, very, very good orientation to sort out the expectations." (Participant K)

6.3.2 Engaging and Diverse Activities

According to the findings, participants emphasised the use of various strategies such as case studies, breakaway rooms, visuals and advertisements, music and marketing techniques, marketing tactics, practical sessions, and hands-on Learning to encourage student engagement and to create a learning experience that is both enjoyable and effective. González (2023) emphasised that video conferencing embedded chat tools, online surveys, and online group breakaway rooms emerged as critical tool for promoting interaction. Orhan and Beyhan (2020) further argued that student feedback can help improve online teaching and participation. Some of the participants responded as follows:

"I used all means visually to keep the attention on the screen. And I started using visuals, adverts, and then also mimic marketing where I use music. Then I developed a practical session." (Participant R)

"Implement innovative methods to get the students involved even if you can't see them." (Participant P)

"I've implemented certain strategies to get more engagement: short case studies, discussions, comprehensive case studies, quizzes in class, breakaway sessions." (Participant R)

6.3.3 Self-Development

The participants highlighted that continuous learning is key for educators to provide an effective and engaging online learning experience. This approach also ensured that online education remains a viable, convenient, and high-quality option for learners.

"We will need to keep abreast with the latest trainings on how to keep the online audience engaged. from time to time, we must find new ways of improving." (Participant S)

"Attend Efundi course {this is the LMS used by the business school} so that you can know how to use more of this platform functions, at the end it benefits all of us." (Participant P)

6.3.4 Prior Class Preparation

The participants emphasised the importance of thorough preparation in online teaching, especially when dealing with adult learners. Educators must have the materials and tools ready well before class commences, along with a strong orientation program. This will assist in setting clear expectations and avoiding potential issues.

"You must be so much better prepared." (Participant K)

"You've got to have your tools and your processes available before the classes start, at least a month before the classes start. because we've got adult students they can work through the material." (Participant K)

7. Recommendations

After analysing the themes and sub-themes the following recommendations are made:

Theme 1
- The hybrid method of teaching and learning is to the benefit of both the student and the lecturer. The main focus should be on continuous commitment on both sides and ensuring that the LMS is continually accessed by especially the lecturer. This proves vital in keeping the students motivated and providing them with constructive feedback.
- Assessments should not only focus on multiple choice. Some lecturers state that higher order thinking is also challenged. The crux is that assessment must address various skills and use various methods to tests skills.
- Technology is core. Therefore, students should be provided with in-depth training of the LMS prior the first class. This can be done during the block session and providing short video-clips for guidance on specific areas.

Theme 2
- It is advised that there should be sessions prior and after a semester where lecturers can reflect on their own competencies and skills. This will provide excellent opportunities for lecturers to learn from one another and also be trained in new technologies.
- Interaction, whether online or contact, will act as motivation for both students and lecturers. It is crucial that communication should not be one-sided and that various strategies should be utlised to get students involved in interaction.
- Plagiarism remains an ongoing problem and will increase with the use of AI. Therefore assessment must be structured in such a way that active learning is tested.
- As to avoid poor assessment methods, lecturers should be trained and encouraged to use different methods.

Theme 3
- Hybrid classes are recommended. Real-life contact sessions are highly recommended as students need time to familiarise them with the lecturers, peers and the surroundings. It will alleviate the stress factor in students and make them more comfortable to interact with the lecturer and each other.
- As said, diverse activities are keys to keep students motivated and engaged throughout the semester. This will also indicate their progress in a specific module which will act as a further motivator to engage throughout.
- Students feel motivated if they can achieve goals that were not possible when they started. Their self-development will be enhanced in their own personal lives and in the workplace.
- Therefore, a good structured LMS and class preparation are the key to success.
- It was recommended that more real-life simulations within group cohorts should be utilised. A further recommendation was that Quiltbot and other AI (artificial intelligence) devices impacts negatively on the learning process. Also, students'

experiences in the work situation should be shared in the classroom as it impacts on a deeper understanding of the different roles of workers in the workplace which in turn enhances active learning.

8. Limitations

This study only focussed on a specific cohort of students within a business school. Furthermore, the students are post-graduates and they are expected to function on a higher level than undergraduate students. Therefore, the outcomes of the study can be used by other business schools but it may not be applicable to undergraduate studies.

9. Conclusion

In this article it was demonstrated that teaching practices need to be revised regularly and technology and needs of students change more often than in the past. An online education and hybrid environment can add value to the teaching and learning process and has many advantages for institutions and students. It is an area that should be explored annually as institutions need to stay cost-effective, offer quality education and offer lecturers who are committed to the changing environment within higher education.

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