An Introspection Into Instructional Challenges at a University in Zimbabwe During the COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract
At the inception of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe, all institutions of learning were ordered to close and allow learners to receive learning from their homes from the 24th of March 2020 after which universities resorted to remote instruction. This paper is interested in assessing the challenges that were being faced in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at a university in Zimbabwe when conducting instruction during the lockdown. Data was collected through semi-structured telephone interviews with 28 research participants who comprised four lecturers from each of the seven departments in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The results of the study showed that the only possible way of teaching during lockdown was utilization of internet communication. Conclusions of the study showed that while online teaching emerged as the only strategy for remote teaching, there was need to do an intensive pre-assessment of available resources for enabling remote instruction.

Keywords
COVID-19, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, online teaching and learning, remote instruction

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Introduction

The sudden changeover in the mode of instruction as a result of COVID-19 disruptions at institutions of learning came with a variety of challenges. In Zimbabwe, schools and all other institutions of learning that include, universities, colleges, polytechnics, and vocational training centers were closed on the 24th of March 2020 before the lockdown started on the 30th of March 2020. Teaching and learning had to continue to take place at universities and other institutions of learning despite the fact that the changeover to new modes of instruction never received enough time for planning purposes. The COVID-19 lockdown took place at a time when it was assumed that online teaching was perceived as the only way that could facilitate virtual instruction. The adoption of online teaching as the only method of facilitating remote instruction brought with itself a plethora of challenges at a university under study. The paper argues that the university should have adopted a variety of methods for delivering instruction instead of relying solely on online teaching. Emergency remote teaching, which this article argues for, was propounded by Hodges et al. (2020) and emphasizes on adopting a variety of modes of instruction that suit different Information and Communication Technology environments and economic conditions.

When the universities closed, the university under study, whose semester is normally 15 weeks was in its 6th week after opening. The students, lecturers, and the management in the institution were puzzled by this lockdown as nobody knew when exactly normal business was going to resume. When the lockdown began the university asked the teaching departments to come up with strategies that would keep learners focused on their academic work and online teaching dominated the proposals by various departments. Online teaching uses internet network and that makes its use susceptible to a variety of challenges in an institution of higher learning that is in a developing country like Zimbabwe. This paper makes a follow up to the challenges that were experienced by both lecturers and students as a result of remote teaching. The focus is put on one faculty, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, out of a total of ten of the faculties at the university under study. The university conducts its business at three locations which include, Gweru, Zvishavane, and Harare campuses. Gweru is the main campus and is the largest, and hosts two schools, the Graduate School of Commerce, and the School of Tourism and Hospitality which are out of the main campus.

The suggestions made by lecturers in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities on how remote teaching was to be done indicated that electronic communication between lecturers and the students was the most favored method. This article is looking at the challenges that were faced in conducting teaching and learning while students and lecturers were away from campus due to the COVID-19 lockdown. This discussion is informed by the fact that when the idea of online teaching was suggested, the issue of challenges was the first to be highlighted. It is therefore prudent to account for those challenges that were and are still being faced when conducting online teaching. The article unpacks the hindrances that were experienced in electronically connecting with
students in teaching, learning, and supervision of dissertations during the COVID-19 lockdown. Online teaching is not new in Zimbabwe since other universities in the country have always been using it to offer open distance learning. Online teaching has normally been done through a blended approach where it is complimented with face-to-face methods.

Despite the benefits that online teaching offers, there are still technical and logistical challenges that hamper its success (Grunwald & Heinrichs, 2015, p. 208). Online teaching has its own challenges just like face-to-face traditional teaching (Bach et al., 2007, p. 124). The fact that online teaching requires internet connection is an indicator that it is bound to be associated with some challenges in a developing country like Zimbabwe. Grunwald and Heinrichs (2015) argue that the challenges associated with online teaching far outstrip the benefits, especially in developing countries (p. 208). In the online class, students may conduct themselves in a manner that is different from a traditional face-to-face classroom (Tropp, 2007, p. 257). The challenges associated with online teaching can be human, which involves lecturers and students; and can also be technical, which involves the efficiency and accessibility of network and gadgets used in the process of teaching and learning.

**Online Teaching and Learning**

It is prudent to review predecessor studies that have focused on online teaching since this article is mainly concerned about challenges that came as a result of adopting this method of instruction during the COVID. A comparison of online teaching and the traditional face-to-face instruction with particular focus on the advantages and disadvantages also forms part of the literature review. Because the COVID-19 pandemic began in China, strategies that were adopted to facilitate remote instruction in that country are briefly looked at. Other studies that are reviewed are those that are centered on challenges in remote instruction in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Although online teaching has been practiced in Zimbabwe, it has not been common because there are no courses that are offered solely online in the country’s tertiary institutions. Chao (2009) notes that different online courses require different kinds of online teaching as they require internet connection and a learning management system (p. 32). Other online courses may require additional technologies such as database servers or online programming packages for hands-on practice (Chao, 2009, p. 32). Casey et al. (2018) note that “Online teaching and learning are becoming more prevalent in public schools and institutions of higher education” (p. i). They point out that online teaching can be divided into two categories and that is “synchronous” and “asynchronous” teaching. Synchronous instruction is “learning that occurs in real time via the internet” whereas asynchronous instruction is where “learning occurs at any time via the internet” (Casey et al., 2018, p. 1). Although the university under study does not have online teaching in the form of open distance learning, e-learning has always been there to complement traditional face-to-face teaching. The kind of blended teaching that has been taking place at the university has been biased towards face-to-face
instruction because there are a lot of technicalities that are related to e-learning such as the internet; Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices; and it requires that the students who access the service have to be registered. The call by the university management to devise ways of engaging with students during the lockdown demonstrates that the university is aware of the ineffectiveness of its already existing e-learning platform.

Bach et al. (2007) examine how online teaching is changing the traditional forms of teaching in higher education. They carried out research to investigate on how online teaching answers the challenges that stem from the traditional face-to-face mode of teaching and learning. They argue that if online teaching is managed correctly, it can add value to traditional face-to-face methods and provide opportunities for reducing some of the weaknesses of traditional teaching methods (Bach et al., 2007, p. 124). The traditional methods of teaching have their own challenges especially during the COVID-19 where conditions do not allow the lecturer and students to convene in a physical space. The traditional method of conducting lectures at universities has been questioned for many years (Bach et al., 2007). This paper looks at the challenges that are associated with online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown at a university in Zimbabwe.

Tropp (2007) carried out a study where comparison was made between the teaching environments experienced by the instructor and the students in a traditional and online class focusing on the misbehavior that occurs in the online course. The argument is that most of the problems that are experienced in online classrooms are extensions of those that are found in a traditional classroom. The misbehaviors that were seen to be occurring in such classes include:

- failure to decode messages from the lecturer or other students accurately, the formation of cliques and isolation of other students, ignoring of instructions by students issued to them by their lecturer, difficulty to apply some classroom techniques by the lecturer for online classes,
- inappropriate communication directed to their lecturers, students expecting the lecturer to be always online, students posting unnecessary questions but expecting responses, and students hiding behind failure by technology for not doing their work (Tropp, 2007).

The study revealed that there are more problems that are associated with online classes as compared to the traditional face-to-face classes. It is therefore prudent to investigate the problems that are associated with the online classes at the selected university during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Casey et al. (2018) looked at the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching and learning. While the main focus of the study is the challenges of online teaching and learning, it is also important to review the advantages as well. One of the advantages of online teaching is that the approach is student-centered (Casey et al., 2018, p. 1). Another advantage of online teaching is that it requires active student participation unlike in a face-to-face class where other students may not actively engage themselves in the learning process. Online learning also allows for greater accessibility, removing geographical barriers to education (Casey et al., 2018, p. 2). To them, greater flexibility
and convenience are important aspects of online teaching. Flexibility and convenience are crucial for learners who have full time employment that hinders them to pursue education in a traditional face-to-face mode (Casey et al., 2018). Online learning also allows students to learn from wherever they are with no travelling. It is argued here that while the advantages of online teaching are appreciated, there are some challenges that counter these advantages at the selected university in the execution of online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown. In outlining the disadvantages of online teaching, Casey et al. (2018) note that “some novice instructors have a great fear of online teaching” because they do not have skills necessary to teach online and also lack familiarity with technological tools (p. 2). Some also fear that online teaching reduces the rigor of the content being taught (Casey et al., 2018). They also note that online instructors struggle to develop a sense of personal presence in the online classroom.

Stern (2004) made a comparison between online and face-to-face instruction in an undergraduate program at a university in America. Stern concluded that time remains an issue for the instructor as workload is high, and students’ desire to shoulder responsibility remains an important issue. Stern (2004) argues that “after all, good teaching practice is good teaching practice whether the classroom is a physical one or an electronic one” (p. 197), this means that lecturers should apply best practice whether they are teaching online or face-to-face. Khine and Lourdusamy (2003) focused their research on combining face-to-face instruction with multimedia viewing and online discussion. The modules that are delivered through information and communication technologies can make learning more interesting and enriching for students (Khine & Lourdusamy, 2003, p. 671). Their study concluded that the trainee teachers appreciated combining face-to-face instruction, multimedia viewing and online discussion as these strategies produced positive results. The university under study has since 2006 been implementing the approach that is discussed by Khine and Lourdusamy where the university adopted e-learning with the aim of complementing face-to-face instruction.

Research done on online-teaching during COVID-19 lockdown have mainly focused on the challenges. Dube (2020) reflected on the challenges faced by rural learners in South Africa during COVID-19 lockdown. Dube (2020) argues that rural learners face unprecedented challenges in adjusting to a new mode of life and learning. While the South African government is promoting online learning as the only alternative in the context of COVID-19, this mode excludes many rural learners from teaching and learning, due to a lack of resources to connect to the internet, the learning management system, and low-tech software (Dube, 2020, p. 134). Nhongo and Tshotsho (2021) examined the approaches for teaching and learning that were used by Zimbabwe’s schools during the COVID-19 lockdown. They suggested that a variety of approaches that suit particular physical environments should have been adopted for each geographical location instead of trying to use a uniform approach throughout the country. Nhongo and Siziba (2022) looked at how the approaches to teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown excluded learners in the rural settings of Zimbabwe. These researches were focusing on schools whilst the current study is interested in teaching and learning at a university in Zimbabwe.
Studies in response to COVID-19 lockdown and the subsequent implementation of online teaching have been carried out in China where the pandemic started. Huang et al. (2020) focused their study on the implementation of teaching and learning during COVID-19 lockdown by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The Chinese Ministry of Education has launched the “Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning” initiative, providing flexible online learning to over 270 million students from their homes (Huang et al., 2020). In describing the initiative by the Ministry of Education of China, the researchers, Zhang et al. (2020) used different terminology where they say the initiative was called “Suspending Classes Without Stopping Learning.” Although these researchers used different terminologies, they were however referring to the same approach that was adopted by China. Their studies focused on the successes and shortcomings of remote teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown. Other researchers who have focused on remote teaching during the lockdown in China include Viner et al. (2020), McAleer (2020), and Wang et al. (2020). China sets a good example on the adoption of various methods through utilizing the readily available resources to implement remote instruction during the COVID-19 lockdown which Zimbabwe should have also adopted instead of trying to implement uniform approaches that needed a lot of unavailable resources to be involved.

Hodges et al. (2020) make a clear distinction between emergency remote teaching and online learning. They argue that in coming up with approaches to use in teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, policy makers should be clear whether they want to adopt online teaching or they want to devise emergency remote approaches to ensure continuity in education. Hodges et al. (2020) note that researchers in educational technology have referred to the types of modes of education that fall under remote teaching as distance learning, distributed learning, blended learning, online learning, and mobile learning. However, Hodges et al. (2020) propose that the term that should be used to refer to the kind of instruction being delivered during the pressing circumstances is “emergency remote teaching.” Challenges that were raised by lectures at the university which are associated with online instruction are discussed from the lens of emergency remote teaching as a theoretical base.

**Research Design and Methodology**

To understand and explore the challenges that were being faced in interaction between lecturers and students during the COVID-19 lockdown, the study uses a qualitative phenomenological research design. The “phenomenological research design requires that in order to understand the experiences of the research participants, there is need for immersive penetration of individuals’ thoughts and insights through employing interviews or extensive discussions” (Alvarez, 2020, p. 145). The immersive penetration in this study was done through interviewing a total of 28 lecturers equitably drawn from the seven departments of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the university under study.

Semi-structured interviews were used to solicit qualitative data from the research participants. Semi-structured interviews were used because the researcher expected
the research participants to provide some more relevant information that could not have been solicited through the questions that were prepared prior to the interview. Each interview took an average of 20 min. The researcher targeted lecturers in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and these were selected through non-probability sampling techniques which included purposeful sampling, snow-ball sampling, and volunteer sampling.

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities has seven departments which include Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies; Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies; Communication Skills; Development Studies; Film and Theatre Arts Studies; History and International Affairs; Modern Languages; and Theology and Religious Studies.

The lecturers were interviewed through the use of open-ended questions so that they could reflect on the challenges that were being faced in academic interaction between them and the students. The study was conducted during the lockdown and therefore interviews were done through WhatsApp and telephone calls as a way of observing COVID-19 regulations particularly, social distancing and travel restrictions. In cases where WhatsApp was used, all the interview questions were sent to the research participants and they would respond through typing the answers and in some instances through voice notes. Another reason for using these channels of communication was the need to use faster, easily accessible, and affordable methods. The students were not interviewed but only their lecturers were engaged because the lecturers were aware of the challenges that were being faced by the students in learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Although the researcher was fully aware that it was important to get first-hand information on the challenges that students were facing as a result of online teaching, they were deliberately not interviewed because locating them and their contact details during the lockdown was going to be difficult. Data was presented and analyzed thematically. The themes that were used emerged through scrutinizing the data prior to presentation. The reviewed literature and emergency remote teaching as a theoretical framework guided data analysis.

The researcher explained to the research participants the overview and focus of the study which is aimed at unravelling the challenges that were faced in interaction between lecturers and students during the lockdown. The ethical consideration such as ensuring the anonymity of the participants throughout the course of the study was explained to them. The actual names of research participants were not used at all in the study. Interview data was destroyed soon after the writing of this paper was completed.

Challenges in Teaching and Learning During the Lockdown at the Selected University

In scrutinizing the data, themes that emerged as challenges are affordability of internet data, access to compatible gadgets, access to uninterrupted internet network and
unavailability of mobile network, erratic electricity supply and limitations in ICT literacy. The interviews that were conducted with a total of 28 lecturers revealed that the only possible strategy that could be adopted for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown was the use of electronic communication. This electronic communication meant engaging with students online via the internet. The lecturers said that they were already engaging with students through email, e-learning, and WhatsApp. Some of the lecturers who were interviewed said that they were yet to make a follow-up with the students because when the university closed for semester break and the subsequent lockdown, they had already given module outlines and assignments to the students. It was however mentioned that although assignments were already given to the students, the challenge was that these students had covered just little content, hence could not be in a position to write the assignments. Secondly, traditionally the students would submit their assignments as hard copies and now there was a need for them to submit online. One lecturer said:

When serious business had just started, the university closed. It is a challenge to us because students had not gone far with their dissertations. My six students that I supervise were all on chapter 2, now it will be difficult to explain to them via email and WhatsApp.

The major challenges that were identified as negatively affecting online teaching were mainly pointing to those learners residing in the rural areas where there is either erratic or no mobile or internet network at all, and unavailability of electricity. The challenges that were pointed out to be negatively affecting those in both rural and urban settings included affordability of data, having access to compatible gadgets, access to uninterrupted internet and mobile network, load shedding and the knowledge of using the required gadgets. It was pointed out that these challenges are not only peculiar to students but also affect lecturers directly as well.

Although the university implemented blended learning in 2006 where e-learning is used in complimenting traditional face-to-face teaching, during the COVID-19 lockdown other means were put in place to compliment e-learning for the purpose of remote teaching. The university, through the Information Technology (IT) Department, launched Google Classroom on the 21st of April 2020 as a way of complimenting e-learning and other electronic communication platforms that lecturers were using to interact with students. On Google Classroom, the lecturers can upload handouts, recorded audio and visual lectures as study packs. There is also provision for both synchronous and asynchronous classrooms on the university’s Google Classroom. Google Classroom helps teachers and students to communicate and can be used to organize and manage teaching, learning, and assignments for collaboration between students and lecturers (O’ Sullivan, 2017; Scholl, 2019). However, the problem with the university’s Google Classroom is that it is only accessible to those students who are registered. Lecturers pointed out that only a few students had registered at the beginning of lockdown and the students were claiming that it had then become impossible to complete the registration process because of the lockdown.
Google Classroom requires one to have a laptop or a smartphone that is installed with an internet browser, Microsoft windows, Apple OSX, or Google’s chrome OS (Zhang, 2016, p. 32). The advantage of Google Classroom is that when its application is set on the smartphone or laptop, it provides push notifications to the device so that students are able to receive notifications whenever their lecturer posts anything unlike an email that a student will have to log in to check for any communication.

The conditions that are required for Google Classroom to take place include having access to good internet for live lessons; having a laptop, desktop, tablet, or smartphone; a suitable workplace with a chair, desk, and ample lighting; stationary; and earphones and microphone (O’Sullivan, 2017; Scholl, 2019; Zhang, 2016). The lecturers who attempted to use Google Classroom as soon as it was launched expressed appreciation saying that it was user friendly. One of the lecturers passed a comment about Google Classroom as follows:

I’ve managed to view the video by the IT guys. The system is super. Very promising innovations there. Hope it will be a success! What I can simply say is the system makes you Smart. You really work smarter and so professional. Very organised.

All the lecturers who were interviewed expressed satisfaction about the inclusion of Google Classroom as a way of keeping the students learning whilst they were away from the university premises during the lockdown. However, although Google Classroom was said to be good, some concerns about the challenges of its use were raised. The concerns raised by lecturers about Google Classroom were that there was need to have internet connection yet in rural areas there was no such service. The issue of having compatible gadgets was also another challenge that was highlighted. The other challenge that lecturers were concerned about was the affordability of data that would enable both lecturers and students to access internet out of campus. In raising these concerns one of the lecturers said:

This is a good move but the challenge is on unregistered students but this will go a long way in helping. It seems this system will only be accessible to registered students.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the university needed not to be too strict about student registration as a pre-requisite for accessing Google Classroom. This waiver was necessary because students were also in a crisis but were eventually going to register. After registering late the implication was that it was going to be difficult for them to catch up because there was no plan in place to make them access the lectures that were done prior. Another lecturer raised concern by posing a question:

How about internet connectivity for students who are required to access content for 5 and in some cases 6 modules? How about the lecturer teaching 4 modules and not all of us have the internet readily available? Let’s be wary of producing shoddy work.
Accessibility and affordability of the internet appeared to be the major challenge for both lecturers and students. One of the lecturers said, “The Lecturer needs capacitation for the system to be rolled out successfully. Otherwise online learning is now very inevitable.” The lecturers who were interviewed were worried that both students and themselves would not afford data for internet connectivity so that they are able to interact through Google Classroom. The other problem with Google Classroom is that those students who are unregistered cannot have access to it. However, those students who are unregistered cannot access the university’s e-learning as well. The problem is that those students who remain unregistered and then eventually register late into the semester would have missed out on a number of lecturers especially those that are conducted through synchronous teaching. Those who are in rural areas where there is no internet are also disadvantaged. Apart from Google Classroom, lecturers pointed out that they were also interacting with the students through other electronic platforms like the emails and WhatsApp.

Learners who are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds were identified as the ones facing many challenges in interacting with their lecturers during the COVID-19 lockdown. Disadvantaged background entails living in the rural areas and lacking financial capacity to afford the required gadgets that are compatible with internet accessibility. It was said that in the rural areas there is no electricity to connect or charge the gadgets such as computers, laptops, tablets, or smartphones. It was also mentioned that in most rural areas there is erratic network and in some there is no network at all which makes it difficult for students to access internet. Lecturers raised a concern that there were some students who would take time to respond even on WhatsApp when the lecturers were trying to notify them that there was material that they had posted to their emails and e-learning accounts. The lecturers said that although WhatsApp was not a formal channel for communicating academic issues, they had no choice but to resort to it because it acted as a notification whenever material was posted to the learners’ emails, e-learning accounts, and Google Classroom. They however said that some learners could not have access even to WhatsApp since they were residing in areas where there is no mobile network. A lecturer posed a question, “So what are those students in the rural areas going to do about accessing online teaching?” One lecturer responded by quoting a message that was sent to him by one student which read:

Morning Dr, haa my challenge is real, hv been trying to send the document but ummm today network yacho iri srs, kuno ku Gokwe (The network is so erratic here in Gokwe) we are neglected, we are seen as zilch. We only have poor 2G services.

Lecturers indicated that many students were in remote areas where there was no network and as a result could not access internet. Some of the areas that were mentioned among many included Gokwe, Binga, Matopo, Kezi, Tsholotsho, Nkayi, Nyanga, Gwanda, Filabusi, Chiredzi, and Plumtree. It also came out that some students were saying that they travel long distances for them to access a network, some said that
they had to go to higher ground and some had to go to certain spots so as to access network. A lecturer mentioned that one of her students said that in a certain area in Plumtree they use network from mobile operators that are based in Botswana and therefore for them to access the network they have to buy airtime using the Botswana Pula which is difficult to get in Zimbabwe. It should be noted that these rural areas also do not have electricity. The lecturers said that students who were staying in areas that have no access to electricity were facing serious challenges in operating their devices.

The lecturers also pointed out that some students did not have gadgets that are compatible with internet for them to access lectures online. This is a problem that was affecting learners from both rural and urban settings. The lecturers were concerned about learners who did not have laptops who wanted to access bulk material using their smartphones and at times not having those smartphones at all. This problem of not having laptops was mainly affecting first year students. One lecturer who was interviewed said:

We are facing a serious challenge with students who do not have laptops and have no access to internet. Remember that most of these students are sons and daughters of civil servants who are not earning enough to afford a laptop so these students are disadvantaged by that scenario. Some would try to access information or send feedback using their cell phones which is not possible. It was better when the university was open before closing for coronavirus where they would use university computers and internet. The first years are the hardest hit because some of them were still not familiar with using computers and some still don’t have them.

The lecturers also said that it was unfair for the university to expect them as lecturers to do online teaching when the university was not providing them with laptops to conduct those online lectures. One lecturer said, “Can they buy the laptops/tablets to use? As you know there is no lecturer with a laptop from the university.” The lecturers felt that the university was not committed to remote teaching because it was not providing them with requisite resources.

Another challenge that was mentioned was the issue of affordability of data by both students and lecturers. The lecturers mentioned that students were saying that they cannot afford to buy mobile and internet data so that they connect online and access learning material from their emails, e-learning, and from Google Classroom. The student body for tertiary institutions, Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) rejected proposals by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development to have students learning through online platforms. ZINASU’s argument for rejecting online teaching was that such is unaffordable and is elitist (Bulawayo24news, 23 April, 2020). Their argument was that data is now expensive in Zimbabwe, and the majority of students who are dependents of those people who are also struggling financially may not afford to buy the required amount of data as they are used to accessing free on-campus internet. One lecturer said, “I want to find out if there is any lecturer who is doing online teaching, where
is this lecturer getting bundles?” Another lecturer said that “If they [the university] want us to work online shouldn’t they be providing the necessary things such as at least the internet bundles?” One lecturer asked a question before putting across her own feeling:

Will we get data because honestly if I am to be working online with the huge classes we have I cannot afford the data? Even if u could, haungaendesi marasha kuHwange (you cannot take coal to Hwange coal mine).

The lecturers were saying that both the students and lecturers could not afford to buy internet data so as to facilitate online classes. The truth is that these students no longer stay on campus and the lecturers are no longer driving to work every day meaning that the funds that could have been using for those expenses could now be used to buy internet data for online teaching and learning. At a time like this one where the whole world is facing many challenges due to COVID-19, citizens should at least compromise and go out of their way to assist the governments of their countries where possible. This can be done by not expecting the government institutions to solely provide all resources for facilitating teaching and learning during the time of crisis, but where possible lecturers and students need to shoulder some responsibilities.

**Conclusion**

Online teaching emerged as the only option that was available to keep the university students learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Online teaching required internet connection and gadgets such as laptops, desktop computers, tablets, and smartphones which some lecturers and students did not have and therefore becoming a challenge. Communication between lecturers and students through Google Classroom, e-learning, emails, and at times WhatsApp were the common modes of remote teaching. A number of challenges were experienced in conducting online teaching and these challenges included access to internet network; having compatible gadgets such as computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones; access to electricity; and affording internet data. Students who reside in rural settings where there is no electricity and poor network for internet connection are the ones who were most disadvantaged as they could not access their learning material online. It was not only the students who faced some challenges with online instruction but lecturers also experienced similar challenges to those of students.

The abrupt adoption of online teaching by the university as an approach to be used for communication between lecturers and students during COVID-19 lockdown in a country with a weak economy and poor infrastructure like Zimbabwe was not a proper one. Online teaching sounds simple and ideal when it is being suggested but it can never be effective in a country with poor ICT infrastructure. The adoption of online teaching requires accessible, reliable, and strong internet which is not the case with Zimbabwe. The approach adopted by the university was improper in the sense that the university wanted to begin by adopting online teaching before assessing
the state of readiness of students and lecturers, and the effectiveness of available ICT infrastructure. Fact finding was supposed to be done first before concluding on remote teaching approaches. The university should have explored various emergency remote teaching approaches that suit the available infrastructure before making conclusions on the adoption of the too obvious online teaching.

Instead of relying on online instruction, some of the strategies that the university could have adopted include asynchronous teaching where lecturers could have been asked to record lectures and saved them on memory cards, compact discs, and memory sticks. This was going to help the learners especially those that had no access to internet network. This approach could also have been advantageous as students could have listened to these lectures from cell phones, radios, or any other compatible devices repeatedly and at their own convenient time. The university could have also had these lectures compiled on hard copies as well so that learners could read at their own convenient time. Relying on online teaching only defeated the whole idea of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 era as an emergency remote teaching approach.

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