

Education Delivery in Higher Learning Institutions during the Times of Covid-19: A Case Study of the Great Zimbabwe University

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Abstract: This study examined the pedagogic or teaching and learning experiences of institutions of higher learning during the COVID-19 period, with particular emphasis on the Great Zimbabwe University in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by the case study research design. The study involved 37 students and 13 lecturers. Results showed that some respondents missed part of their lectures and submission of assignments some were apprehensive about missing their graduation while others struggled to pay the tuition. Further, it was revealed that while the WhatsApp platform proved cheapest and most popular amongst students and lecturers, a number of challenges were faced, including lack of orientation on the adopted learning platforms, unpredictable power supply and garget breakdowns which might have affected student grades. Results also showed that GZU provided limited data bundles, masks and sanitizers to lecturers during COVID-19. The recommendations of the study include the establishment on an institutional policy that addresses and curbs the negative impact of emergency periods. It is further recommended that loans, bursaries and scholarships be introduced. The study finally recommends that there be a concerted effort of stakeholders towards ensuring adequate provision of resources to curb the impact of lockdowns and other emergencies.

Keywords: COVID-19; Pandemic; Impact; Lockdown; Methodology

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Introduction

Since time immemorial, pandemics have affected the formal and informal sectors of any given society including schools, and institutions of higher education. While countries and institutions of education responded to the effects of COVID-19 in different ways, the majority of students and lecturers were affected individually and collectively.

While contingent models of lecture delivery were introduced, some of the new teaching methods proved beyond the reach of some of the students, with some the learners losing their sources of income, due to the direct and indirect impact of the scourge.

The novel Coronavirus, which is also known as COVID-19 or 2019-nCoV and which falls within the pneumonia family, started in Wuhan City, China, in late 2019 (Koca, 2020). Before long, the pandemic had spread globally with terrible consequences. Therapeutic diagnosis as well as findings has shown that people tainted with Coronavirus can be asymptomatic or symptomatic, especially in the premature stages of the virus, depending on an individual's immune system. Signs of the infection included a dry cough, fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, headache and the general weakness of the body (Nwagbara et al, 2021). According to the authors, the obscure hereditary scenery effect of the disease or its tendency to mutate made it complex to manage.

Coronavirus affected a lot of Zimbabweans in the formal and informal sectors, including education, which is comprised of primary, secondary and higher levels of education. Matsilele (2021) noted that most Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning adopted WhatsApp and Google Classroom models of teaching and learning during the Coronavirus-induced lockdowns. However, majority of students could not effectively participate in the learning processes for reasons that included lack of finances and resources, as well as general resistance to changes amongst some of the students and lecturers.

Similar findings came out of a study carried out in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Mukute, Francis, Burt & De Souza, 2020). While the researchers focussed on the online teaching themes and the challenges faced by the transition from face-to-face classes to online classes, the impact of the pandemic on the academic-side of the students and faculty in higher levels of education remained largely unexplored. Therefore, this study sought to establish the teaching and learning experiences of institutions of higher learning during the COVID-19 period, with particular emphasis on Great Zimbabwe University.

1. What was the impact of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning process at Great Zimbabwe University?
2. What challenges were encountered in the use of online teaching methodologies adopted by Great Zimbabwe University during the lockdown?
3. Which measures were implemented by Great Zimbabwe University to ensure effective learning during the lockdown?

COVID-19 and some of the global experiences

At international level, statistics show that approximately 177,818,044 people were infected and 3,849,000 had died due to COVID-19 by June 2021 (Worldometers, 2021). Unfortunately, infectious diseases cannot be regulated and confined to specific countries or regions. They can go in any direction (Gostin, 2020). This stage of the study focuses on some of the experiences from developed countries and from a developing country, so as to establish how the COVID-19 period was handled.

Globally, the pandemic time caused by the Coronavirus created a situation whereby the vulnerable groups were worst hit, as the formal and

informal sectors found themselves having to close business, as the different countries pursued the recommendations of the World Health Organisation to lockdown and to curb the spread of the virus (Haldevang, 2020). The lockdowns meant people could not go to work, nor cross the national borders, nor gather for family, nor attend school and religious functions. Billions of people were ordered to self-quarantine, wear face masks, hand sanitise and practice social distancing.

The United States of America faced the realities of the Coronavirus earlier than Africa since the pandemic was diagnosed at the end of January, 2020 in North America, leading to the declaration of a public health emergency by the Secretary of Health and Human Services soon after (Garner, Safir & Schild, 2020).

North America's experienced the brunt of the virus at different intervals, but the national government cushioned job losses and other challenges brought about by the pandemic via the economic stimulus payment, unemployment benefits and funding towards housing and food at a time travel declined (Garner, Safir & Schild, 2020). Consequently, the authors assert that consumer buying power decreased by 34 percent or by \$7.5 billion.

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Despite the job losses amongst the Americans, the stimulus cushioned the citizens. For instance, according to Falk, Romero, Carter, Nicchitta and Nyhof (2021), the nation's unemployment rate increased from 3.5 percent in February 2020, to 4.4 percent in March 2020 and, again, picked to 14.8 percent in April 2020 but had fallen to 5.8 percent in May 2021. The experience of Americas might reflect how the developed countries responded to COVID-19. Support of the central government during the pandemic in America lacked in Zimbabwe, which negatively affected the education transitions, including at the likes of Great Zimbabwe University.

Nigeria is one unique African country, given its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic position. Like most of the African countries, while Nigeria had one of the lowest official numbers of the infected, this might have been a result of lack of tests. From its first case in February 2020, Nigeria's next case was towards the middle of March of the same year (Ogujiuba & Binase, 2021). However, by the end of May 2020, the West African state had reached 10,000 reported cases (World Health Organization, 2020).

Despite its limitations, Nigeria affected a number of responses to the pandemic that included building a stronger system that ensured prevention, early detection as well as quick response and establishment of an isolated center at the University of Abuja, which was equipped with a rapid team and laboratory equipment meant for emergency control (Ogujiuba & Binase, 2021). Infections went up though by July 2020.

The capricious nature of Nigeria's response to the pandemic might also have been a result of the government's reduction of the waiting period for results to a couple of hours due to the introduction of the GeneXpert COVID-19 diagnosis machine, adding more health facilities and training more health workers (Bhaumik, Moola, Tyagi, Nambiar & Kakoti, 2020). The Nigerian example might be a reflection of how the pandemic was handled in the majority of the African states. Lethargic responses experienced in Nigeria caricatures what Zimbabwe also went through, especially in the early days of the pandemic.

Higher Education during the COVID-19 Period

Different countries and different institutions of higher learning responded to COVID-19 in a number of ways.

The United States of America and the way it handled the pandemic helps towards an understanding of how COVID-19 was handled at national and institutional level in the developed countries. In addition, different institutions of higher and tertiary learning in North America responded differently to the pandemic and each institution was affected differently from the others.

In the USA, nearly all the colleges and universities had gone online by the end of 2020 due to the pandemic (Kelly & Columbus, 2020). There were lots of speculations on the pathways that higher and tertiary education were to pursue, especially in the areas of teaching, learning, socialising and

researching. In addition, the pandemic period constrained the institutions in terms of the ability to offer quality and core services, ensure the security and safety of the students, faculty, staff as well as the surrounding communities.

In addition to the confirmation that roughly two-thirds of the faculty altered their course assignments and course syllabuses while nearly half lowered expectations for the student work, dropped some assignments or tests or went for a pass/fail option, instead of a letter grade (Ellis, 2020), other challenges faced by higher education in North America included the retention of financial health and fiscal challenges that witnessed some colleges and universities downsizing their staff and faculty (Kelly et al, 2020). Part of the challenges came up with user-friendly online academic timetables while auxiliary revenue generating institutional businesses faced a bleak future, due to loss of revenue.

Statistics in North America revealed that by early March 2020, a number of learning institutions, such as the University of Washington and Stanford University, promptly adopted the online teaching model and were soon joined by more than 84 colleges (Mangan, 2020). Significantly, findings revealed that majority of post-secondary students in North American institutions preferred the face-to-face model, which was under the threat of the pandemic (Kelly & Columbus, 2020). By the end of March 2020, close to 1,400 in the USA institutions of higher and tertiary learning had gone virtual (Ellis, 2020). The survey showed that faculty adopted various teaching and learning models or platforms that included existing learning models in the institutions.

Kelly and Columbus (2020) postulated that a majority of the students involved in the survey believed that online learning was unengaging and was subsequently inferior to face-to-face learning experience. Positively, a majority of the students and lecturers were sympathetic to the situation, hence lauded the crisis response of their institutions to the pandemic.

According to the authors, North American institutions were projected to lose from the fees and other incomes to the tune of \$25 million for George Washington, \$66 million for the University of Arizona, \$90 million for North-western University and \$100 million for Penn State University. Consequently, and despite expected relief funds from the federal government as a way of addressing

the financial pinch during COVID-19, some of the universities in the USA were projected to lay off some of their employees, with approximately 50,000 losing their work in 218 institutions (Bauman, 2020).

In addition, budget cuts were experienced during the pandemic period, which affected state universities in the likes of Missouri, New Jersey and Ohio where higher education funding for the fiscal year was reduced by \$76 million, \$110 million and \$120 million, respectively (Kelly & Columbus, 2020).

The Turkish experience showed that the country addressed the scourge in three stages. According to Koca (2020), the stages included the protection period (January-February 2020) which involved raising public awareness, provision of border security and sprucing up of the healthcare infrastructure; the period of the fight against the pandemic (March-May 2020) which included the adoption of a strategy on controlling the spread of the disease and on diagnosis and treatment. The last stage involved the spread of diagnostic laboratories, early diagnosis as well as treatment, contact tracing and management of the medication and protective materials.

Turkey successfully implemented sound policies against the pandemic and its risk and management developed a number of conditions that addressed all aspects of life, including healthcare, travel, tourism, international relations, agriculture and education, among others (Koca, 2020). Notably, the country also adopted state-funded online classes for its schools and universities. Turkey's success to manage the pandemic was attributed to the country's sound leadership and governance of President Erdogan.

In Africa, one of the worst affected sectors by COVID-19 was education with schools, colleges and universities having to shut down at different times. The International Labor Organization (2020) revealed that during the pandemic time, Africa's schools, colleges and universities closed, which affected the youth, especially those who were enrolled in the academic programs, interns and apprentices on the continent and elsewhere.

Schools, colleges and universities faced challenges that threatened to stall the education progress made in the recent decades due to the pandemic as it became difficult for the learners to attend school and for governments to fund them. According to

Daly (2021), even though the student retention and graduation rates were bound to decrease in the immediate term, demand for higher education in Africa exceeds opportunities. The author posited that COVID-19 was to result in states pulling away from funding higher education initiatives towards pandemic-related issues, as a result of fiscal fallouts.

The author also points to the fact that while a number of higher learning institutions turned to virtual learning in Africa, the economic downturns witnessed students dropping from higher education; those who could afford online lessons and other modes of media communication such as the television and radio, could not afford electricity nor internet. The findings are synonymous with those of UNESCO cited in Aborode, Ayodele, Ireteyayo and David (2020), which asserted that 89 percent of tertiary students in sub-Saharan Africa have no access to home computers and 82 percent have no internet access. This translate to the fact that online learning cannot accommodate all students.

Some of the African institutions of higher learning got a golden hand from their state governments that facilitated for physical and digital infrastructure to support online learning while those that already had distant learning programmes helped other institutions during the pandemic. For instance, the South African government injected R12 billion towards basic and higher education so as to address online lessons (Matsilele, 2020). Some telecommunication companies waived fees for students while non-profit organisations distributed solar-powered devices to the needy students in the likes of South Africa, Rwanda, Nigeria, Ghana and Egypt (Aborode, Ayodele, Ireteyayo & David 2021). According to the study, some of the institutions in the aforementioned African states provided free platforms, data packages and laptops to their students.

Africa has a youth population bulge in recent years, and the state governments tried to provide the needed resources for students from poorer backgrounds while more institutions were also put under construction, hence by 2020 the African continent had more than 1,600 public and private tertiary institutions (Daly, 2021). Yet in May 2021, it was projected that the continent's per capita spending on education would decline by four percent due to COVID-19.

The other education programmes that got pinned back involved African students meant to enrol into

the American institutions. Some of the students were funded by the host American institutions, while others had scholarships and funding from their governments; for instance, Nigeria spent around \$514 million on schooling in the USA, yet due to COVID-19, the international enrolment of the African students into the American education system dropped by 43 percent during the 2020 to 2021 school year (Daly, 2021).

Zimbabwe's higher education was equally hit since all institutions of higher learning went under phased lockdowns from March 2020. Fortunately, the country is part of the Southern African Development Committee and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural agreement, which assisted towards mobile resources for distance and remote learning. The 'Learning-Never-Stops' concept that was adopted by the region's 16 countries witnessed the development of the Education Sector COVID-19 response plans or strategies which focussed on continuing to provide education through distance learning during the pandemic, the reopening of institutions and resumption of phased education when the pandemic ends, and provision of quality and equity of the service (Mukute, Francis, Burt & De Souza, 2020). Implementation might have been the main challenge though. For instance, while the South African government injected funds towards online classes, as already noted, the Zimbabwe government did not revise its budget nor put any funds towards online programs (Matsilele, 2021).

Findings show that Zimbabwe's students and faculty involved in the natural sciences struggled doing the experiments online while some instructors and learners were observed to lack the basics needs to participate via the new route (UKAID, 2020). These findings corroborated with those of Mukute, Francis, Burt and De Souza (2020), who found out that some of the students lacked funds for data, radios, televisions, computers, mobile phones and even suffered from lack of access to electricity. The shift to online classes reshaped an accustomed pedagogy and Zimbabwe was one of the affected countries with a findings attesting to the difficulties encountered by some of the students. The authors referred to one Zimbabwean parent who shared an experience of her four children competing for one digital garget to support their online learning. That meant that many parents and guardians were either unable or unwilling to provide the necessary enabling environment to support online education at home. A notable variable was also presented by

the authors when they discovered that girls and women faced greater workloads when learning and working, compared to their male counterparts. In the context, one SA-based Zimbabwean lecturer was quoted by the authors as having alluded to the fact that the pandemic had redefined her role of being a breadwinner and being able to fend for the family, to that of being able to work in localised and creative ways.

Manungo and Rukuni (2021)'s findings concluded that COVID-19 left most families financially crippled due to the perennial lockdowns in Zimbabwe, particularly Masvingo. During the lockdowns, schools, colleges and universities were closed. The authors also found out that the country's situation was made dire by the fact that the national economy was mostly under the control of the informal sector which malfunctioned during the period. Their findings also confirmed that students from higher education were negatively affected, especially those with limited access to the online platforms.

Despite the aforementioned findings, the real impact of the pandemic on the institutional teaching and learning methods in Zimbabwe remains largely unknown.

Methodology

This section highlights the research methodology that was utilized by this study.

Research Approach

This study used the qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a means for exploring as well as understanding groups or individuals; the process involves addressing emerging questions and procedures, with collected data fitting into existing and emerging themes, and the researcher making sense of the data. Qualitative research has several benefits that include a detailed description of the participants' opinions, feelings and experiences, and interpretation of their course of actions (Denzin, 1989).

Research Design

This study made use of the case study design. According to Baxter and Jack (2010), case studies facilitate the exploration of a phenomenon within its context through the use of a variety of data sources. This means that issues are not explored in one lens but a variety of lenses which allow for a number of facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.

Population and Sampling

At the time of the study, Great Zimbabwe University had over 18,000 undergraduate and graduate students in its system, excluding the international students (Great Zimbabwe University Website, 2021). While getting responses from the whole population was impractical, Crouch and McKenzie (2006) assert that approximately 20 respondents to a questionnaire are enough to reflect the true nature of a phenomenon. This study had a sample size of 50 participants, 13 lecturers and 37 students, who responded to the questionnaire and those available at the time for the focus group discussion. Of the 28 students who addressed the questionnaires, 15 were male and 13 female. The 13 faculty members that attended to the questionnaire comprised of 10 males and 3 females. Notably, there was no control of the researcher over the gender that participated in responding to the questionnaire but for the focus group discussion, which was used to triangulate the study and comprised of 5 female and 4 males.

The researcher used a combination of the snowball and convenience sampling methods to determine the sample sizes, given the inconsistencies of the school calendar due to COVID-19 induced lockdowns.

Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to whether or not findings of the study are accurate from the perspective of the researcher, participants and readers (Creswell, 2014). According to Golafshani (2003), validity refers to an embodiment of replicability or repeatability of observation or results. Given a number of challenges faced by questionnaires and interviews, including selective memory and pretense, Dennis and Korth (2013) suggest that validity can be confirmed and retained through self-reflexivity of the field notes, getting constant feedback from the participants, transparency of the methods, giving due credit to participants, being mindful of the participants, behaving honestly and kindly and considering the needs of the participants. For this study, it was imperative that questionnaire data be triangulated with data collected via focus group discussion where it was easier to observe behavior, control the conversation and get frank feedback from the participants.

Twycross and Shields (2004) aver that reliability refers to stability, consistency and repeatability of results. In other terms, results are deemed reliable

as long as similar results can be consistently obtained in similar circumstances, but in different circumstances or at different times. According to Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utrianinen & Kyngas (2014), reliability of dependability also refers to possible transferability of the main characteristics of participants to other or different contexts for assessment. This study bought into Bailey's (1978) suggestion that observation is one method of confirming reliability. This was possible during the focus group discussion and also since the researcher is part of the institution where the study was carried.

Ethical Considerations

Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2005) defined ethics as a branch of philosophy focused on the conduct of people as well as guide the standards and norms of behavior of people and how they relate with each other. Shah (2011) says ethics is a way of life or an ethos or social norms that regulate people's conduct between what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Efficacies of upholding ethics include the enhancement of the purpose of research, which includes the dissemination of knowledge, reporting the truth and counteracting against errors (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). In this study, ethical consideration was upheld through protecting the participants' background, names, making sure that the instruments used to collect data were devoid of questions that caused anxiety and discomfort and informing them that they were not obliged to address questions that they were uncomfortable with. In addition, the researcher informed the respondents about the purpose of the study, risks and benefits of their participation and that their participation was a voluntary exercise.

Statistical Treatment of Data

This study used the thematic approach to analyze data. The findings were organized into descriptive themes which were then interpreted into analytical themes. Thematic analysis is a method of systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning or themes across the dataset and the method allowing the researcher to note and make sense of collective or shared experiences and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher sought to make sense, through interpretation, the teaching learning methods used by the Great Zimbabwe University's students and lecturers during COVID-19.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study. It was guided by research questions.

Research Question 1: What was the impact of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning process at Great Zimbabwe University?

Data gathered via questionnaires and the focus group discussion show that full-time and part-time students were affected in various ways. At the commencement of the pandemic universally, there was a lot of apprehension before Zimbabwe enforced its first lockdown in March 2020. Leading to the first lockdown, institutions of higher and tertiary learning had tried to sustain face-to-face lessons. Evidence showed that African leaders quickly paid heed to the World Health Organization's to close the majority of the institutions at the beginning of COVID-19 compared to their counterparts elsewhere, but with more confusion, inadequate preparations and patchy and confusing information (Ed Tech Hub, 2020).

The majority of the students highlighted that COVID-19 hit their personal space, which had an impact on their studies. One of them confirmed that:

For me, the universal lockdown as result of the pandemic was a cultural shock, which I took time to adjust to and when the situation became dicier, the more my apprehension about my academic life at GZU also grew. The burden became both, individual and collective, since my family also had to face the challenge.

Some senior students feared that their studies would be elongated due to the stretch of the semesters and sessions. In addition, several senior students feared that they would not complete their studies within the graduation year.

Results also showed that a number of students, especially those working in the health sector, feared for their well-being in the early days of the pandemic. Within the context, one student highlighted that:

I work in a medical institution where I was extremely exposed to people infected with COVID-19. Travelling long distances for work exposed me to the pandemic. At the same time, working on school assignments while traumatized did not help much. Worse still, I could not even mix with

family members. In addition, the semesters stretched more that was welcome while my part-time jobs were seriously disrupted.

A number of the students confirmed being infected by the pandemic and being unable to submit their assignments on time. In the same breadth, there were several statements that revealed the ordeal of the students, including "I tested positive for COVID-19 and spent two weeks in severe pains and having difficulties in breathing and a time take-home assignments were required," "I was attacked by the pandemic and spent two weeks in severe pain, which affected my academics" and "I lost my job, which used to sustain me and from which I used to pay for my fees."

Out of Coman, Tiru, Mesesan-Schmitz, Stanciu and Bularcas (2020)'s study amongst Romanian institutions of higher learning, similar challenges were found at the commencement of COVID-19; these included physical stress, distraction, lack of motivation, isolation and health concerns due to hours spent in front of the machine and lack of physical exercise.

Findings of this study also confirmed that a number of students involved in the questionnaire were forced to miss lectures during the pandemic, though some consistently attended. Despite the fact that some of the students might have missed a number of lectures due to the pandemic, it seems the majority of them might not have necessarily missed a full semester or session of study. In addition, a few others missed a full semester or session due to the direct or indirect impact of COVID-19. These might have been infected by the pandemic or failure to raise enough fees. It may not be disputed though, that some of the students might have taken pandemic time to deliberately miss lectures, especially in cases where they were not compelled to submit hospital or doctors' reports.

Moreover, studies from Ecuador, Zambia, Paraguay Cambodia, amongst other low and mid-income countries, showed a grapple with poor quality of instruction well before the pandemic, with about 23 percent of the students achieving the minimum levels of what was required (OECD, 2020). This meant that education in developing countries, such as Zimbabwe, was predictably going to be in a worse situation, since the sector was already suffering before the pandemic. This was confirmed in an African survey, which revealed that some of the

challenges that were faced by students during the pandemic included failure to complete course syllabuses, lack of access to technology, unsuitable home environment and lack of access to manage online learning (Ed Tech Hub, 2020).

In the case of this study, several lecturers recalled some of their students missing face-to-face engagements due to the scourge. On their part, some of the lecturers confirmed missing some lectures due to the pandemic. Critically, some of the lecturers highlighted that they failed to complete their syllabuses during the pandemic period. In addition, some of the lecturers asserted that they missed international conferences, research and post-graduate appointments and some deadlines.

On a positive note, the COVID-19 period in Africa might have benefitted some students through working with parents who knew the subject areas, more than they did at school. In Botswana, it was found that continuing learning via the online method yielded positive results on the learning outcomes due to parental engagement (OECD, 2020). This might reveal the fact that, with investment, commitment and change of mind-set, education in desperate periods, such as the one presented by the pandemic, might have ended up being beneficial.

Similarly, Lamichhane (2020) believes that online learning has a number of efficacies, especially where students have access to resources including persistence, accessibility, effective time management, appropriate communication skills, self-reliance, basic technical skills, reading and writing skills, motivation and independence and a good study environment.

Research Question 2: What challenges were encountered in the use of online teaching methodologies adopted by Great Zimbabwe University during the lockdown?

A number of online teaching methods were adopted by different lecturers at GZU during the pandemic period. A number of students highlighted that they mostly used the Google Classroom and WhatsApp platforms for online classes, though the majority claimed to have mostly benefitted from the latter. Some of the most unpopular online platforms were Zoom, which the students thought was expensive. While some of the faculty found the two platforms useful, some technical programs, such as computer

sciences, used different online platforms relevant to their area.

Most lecturers involved in the research corroborated with the students, since they found most of the online platforms difficult and expensive, save for the WhatsApp platform which they felt was convenient for all the parties. A few lecturers preferred the Blackboard and Google Classroom though.

For most students and lecturers, the WhatsApp platform was cheaper, easier to access, user-friendly and it provided for video calls. One respondent revealed that:

The WhatsApp platform was the most effective method because it is one online route that most people, including students, have access. It was the easiest way to communicate in a humble economy and one can be reached using any garget. So, compared to other platforms, WhatsApp proved the cheapest and most efficient platform to use during COVID-19.

A common challenge amongst the majority of the students was the finances, especially amongst the full-time students, whose parents and guardians were affected by the pandemic. Another challenge for the online platforms was orientation since a majority of students had not been oriented on the use of any platform. Results showed that due abrupt closure of institutions, orientation never took place for some, including the freshmen who started their studies during the lockdown.

The quagmire of the new students was also confirmed by Al-Rawi (2013)'s study, which showed that in addition to other challenges faced by online platforms, such as lack of access to relevant gadgets, limited trustworthiness of the tools, learning processes and difficulties of dealing with large classes, one of the most affected groups were the new students in the system.

A number of students confirmed that the lockdown-induced online learning models adopted by their lecturers affected their academic performance. Some confirmed in the focus group discussion that as a result, they attained their worst grades during the period. Similar result came out from the lecturers who all confirmed that the students' performance and results took a knock during the lockdown.

While under lockdown, some of the challenges against online platforms included power cuts, garget malfunctions and lack of student response during lectures since some of the students remained silent. One teaching respondent postulated:

I observed that not all students had access to WhatsApp mobile phones after all. Given that some of the platforms are more informal than otherwise, it was always going to be difficult to monitor and check on the progress of the students. In addition, it is difficult to carry out any assessment of a student online, so face-to-face engagement remains the best method of teaching.

Results from Great Zimbabwe University seem to suggest that, while some of the lecturers were self-funded for data and access to online facilities, some benefitted from the contributions of the institution. The outcome seems to suggest that while there might have been some institutional supports in this direction, resources might not have been enough for online delivery. From the data gathered for this study, all the students claimed that they had not received any institutional support towards data bundles hence the data bundles were self-funded. The findings are synonymous with Matsilele (2020)'s assertion that in Zimbabwe, as was elsewhere in southern Africa, there were a number of lecturers and children from a poorer background who faced serious challenges of accessing technical facilities required for online lessons, such as laptops while data bundles were out of reach for most students.

Study findings amongst the students and lecturers revealed that they largely utilized the mobile phone in their online participation with a few having used both the mobile phone and the laptop. Results showed that some of the students and lectures had moments when they had challenges with the gadgets that they used for the online classes, which included fatigue of aged equipment, power cuts, capricious network, limited storage and general lack of adequate data.

In addition, Picciano (2017)'s findings showed that the approach can be impeccable given its strength in student-lecturer reflection, content analysis, social and emotional attachments fostered, independent study, student-generated content, evaluation, questioning and discussion involvement. A blended approach, which mixes face-to-face and online classes such as one adopted by the institution under

study, could be the way to go in developing countries.

Research Question 3: Which measures were implemented by Great Zimbabwe University to ensure effective learning during the lockdown?

As already noted, the institution under study put several measures in place to limit the damages of the pandemic including online teaching and provision of data, though not everyone might have benefitted from the gesture. This was likely due to limited capital to provide enough resources. The majority from the respondents revealed that the university could have done more during the COVID-19 period. In addition, some averred that response to challenges as the one faced education during the lockdowns called for concerted efforts of all the stakeholders.

Like any other institution, COVID-19 ripped apart most plans for GZU. While the inevitable might have been clear in early 2020, the immediate closure of March 2021 might have come as a surprise to most organizations in Zimbabwe, including GZU. The lockdown experience left an indelible mark and a number of lessons for institutions, if the ripple effects of future lockdowns are to be addressed through proper preparation and administration.

Findings elsewhere showed that a number of governments cut spending towards public education during pandemic times. For example, Ukraine cut education spending by 4 percent or US\$217 in 2020, while Sierra Leone's was cut by 4 percent as funds were diverted elsewhere during the Ebola period. Similar results were notable in the likes of Malawi and Madagascar during the COVID-19 period (World Bank Group, 2020).

One respondent summarized the role played by GZU during the COVID-19 period by postulating that:

GZU did the bit that it could, including providing sanitizers, face masks and sufficient space for learning purposes especially when the students came for face-to-face classes according to their intakes. In addition, some faculty and students got some data bundles, though these proved inadequate later on.

Findings of this study showed that there were a number of areas that needed more attention towards a successful response to lockdowns. These included data bundles and internet services,

gadgets, orientation on some of the online platforms and so forth. As a result, one of the respondents said:

I believe that the students and lecturers do not have the necessary requisite skills and resources to work around e-learning successfully. A lot needs to be done to establish if the online program is going to be a success; for instance, a majority of the students do not have laptops, which is a disadvantage already. Also, given the different backgrounds of the students, enforcing e-learning at this historic moment tantamount to committing epistemological social injustice on them-we need way to abate this.

Similar sentiments were shared by the lecturers in their questionnaire responses. One respondent revealed an idea that the students, parents and guardians, internet service providers and computer and laptop providers might have a role to play in making sure that the militating effects of the pandemic period are averted. In this vein, it was critical for Africa to engage or collaborate with as many players as possible, if the continent's education system was to survive. While there is evidence that the international community provided funding towards the African response to COVID-19, more needed to be done in mobilizing local resources. For instance, the World Bank mostly provided 66 percent support to the West and East African countries' education systems in 2021 but such funding was predicted to shrink by around 13 percent from 2022 (ADEA, AU/CIEFFA & APHRC, 2021).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following are conclusions and recommendations of the study based on the findings.

Since some respondents missed part of their lectures and submission of assignments, were apprehensive about missing their graduation and struggled to pay their tuition, it is recommended that GZU establishes an institutional policy that addresses and curbs the negative impact of emergency periods. It is further recommended that loans, bursaries and scholarships be introduced.

Due to the fact that the WhatsApp platform proved cheapest and most popular amongst students and lecturers, that there was lack of orientation on the adopted learning platforms, that there were power

and garget challenges which might have affected student grades, it is, therefore, recommended that all official online platforms adopted be well-funded and administered at institutional level.

Since GZU provided limited data bundles, masks and sanitizers to lecturers during COVID-19, it is recommended that there be a concerted effort of stakeholders towards ensuring adequate provision of resources to curb the impact of lockdowns and other emergencies in the future.

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