

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective perspectives of residence heads' experiences and responses during COVID-19 at a Free State university, South Africa

Perspectives de réflexion sur les expériences et les réponses des responsables de résidence pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 dans une université de l'État libre, en Afrique du Sud

Mpho P. Jama¹ & Pulane Malefane²

Article history: Received 25 October 2022 | Accepted 22 April 2024 | Published 22 July 2024

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic affected higher education institutions negatively, especially departments such as Students Affairs at the University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa. When the national lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020, some students were already in recess and had vacated their residences. Students that had remained were given 72 hours to vacate their residences. By 26 March 2020, the residences were locked, and only a few international and graduate students remained. These changes affected the functioning of residence heads because they had to assume different roles. This reflective article provides perspectives on the experiences and responses of residence heads during the different levels of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa and recommendations for future practice and responses of the participating residence heads. The article uses reflective scholarship of practice as a methodology and incorporates Schön's (1987) reflection as knowing-in-action and further draws on Luescher's (2018) template for the structure and key components of reflective practice. A focus group discussion was also done to elicit more data from participants. The findings indicate that residence heads experienced anxiety and fear related to their students, families, and jobs during the different lockdown levels. The responses show that effective communication with students and university stakeholders during all levels of the lockdown was key, although confusing and conflicting at times. Most available studies have focused on the experiences and responses of students, teaching and learning, and institutions, but only a few on residence heads during COVID-19. This study provides not only an account of the experiences and responses of residence heads but also recommendations for future residence head practice in student affairs and institutions during similar times of crisis.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19 pandemic, Student Affairs, Residence Life, residence heads, reflective practice

- 1 Professor Mpho P. Jama, Research Fellow and Emeritus Professor: Division Student Learning and Development, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences; and Residence Head: Student Affairs, University of the Free State, South Africa. Email: JamaMP@ufs.ac.za. ORCID: 0000-0002-3263-4775.
- 2 Pulane Malefane, Head: Residence Life and College Communities, Student Affairs, University of the Free State, South Africa. Email: MalefaneP@ufs.ac.za. ORCID: 0000-0002-1881-1835.

RÉSUMÉ

La pandémie de COVID-19 a eu des répercussions négatives sur les établissements d'enseignement supérieur, en particulier sur les départements tels que celui des œuvres estudiantines de l'Université de Free State (UFS) en Afrique du Sud. Lorsque le confinement national a été annoncé le 23 mars 2020, certains étudiants étaient déjà en vacances et avaient quitté leurs résidences. On avait donné 72 heures aux autres étudiants pour quitter leurs résidences. Le 26 mars 2020, les résidences étaient fermées et seuls quelques étudiants internationaux et des cycles supérieurs pouvaient encore rester. Ces changements avaient une incidence sur le fonctionnement des responsables de résidence, car ils devaient assumer des rôles différents. Cet article réflexif offre des perspectives sur les expériences et les réponses des responsables de résidence pendant les différents niveaux de confinement pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 en Afrique du Sud, ainsi que des recommandations sur les pratiques et les réponses futures des responsables des résidences concernés. L'article utilise la réflexion critique sur la pratique professionnelle comme méthodologie et intègre la réflexion de Schön (1987) en tant que connaissance-en-action. Il s'appuie également sur le modèle de Luescher (2018) pour la structure et les éléments clés de la réflexion. Une discussion de groupe a également été organisée pour obtenir davantage de données de la part des participants. Les résultats indiquent que les responsables des résidences ont ressenti de l'anxiété et de la peur liées à leurs étudiants, à leurs familles et à leurs emplois pendant les différents niveaux de confinement. Les réponses montrent qu'une communication efficace avec les étudiants et les parties prenantes de l'université à tous les niveaux du confinement était essentielle, même si elle était parfois confuse et conflictuelle. La plupart d'études disponibles se sont penchées sur les expériences et les réponses des étudiants, sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage, ainsi que sur les institutions, mais très peu sur les responsables des résidences pendant la crise COVID-19. Cette étude présente non seulement un compte-rendu des expériences et des réponses des responsables des résidences, mais aussi des recommandations concernant les pratiques futures des responsables des résidences dans le domaine des œuvres estudiantines ainsi que pour leurs institutions lors de périodes de crise similaires..

MOTS-CLÉS

Pandémie COVID-19, œuvre estudiantine, vie en résidence, responsables des résidences, pratique réflexive

Introduction and background

The COVID-19 pandemic required all higher education institutions to adhere to lockdown regulations. The first regulations required South African universities to suspend all in-person engagement in academic buildings, including all out-of-class spaces. Subsequently, these spaces, such as residences, had to be vacated as far as possible. However, the various waves of COVID-19 created various phases of uncertainty in the re-opening of universities to pre-pandemic levels.

Similar to other countries, the South African Government implemented different lockdown levels that restricted the movements of people in one way or another. On 23 March 2020, the President announced lockdown level 5, a three-week nationwide lockdown with severe restrictions on travel and movement between provinces, districts, and metropolitan areas (South Africa DoH, 2020, 1 of 5). At the University of the Free State (UFS), students were already in recess and could not return to the university. Those who remained were given 72 hours to vacate their residences.

By the 26 March 2020, the residences were locked and only a few international and graduate students remained. When the country moved to level 4 of the lockdown from the 1st to the 31st May 2020, the Minister of Higher Education and Training announced that academic activities could resume for certain groups of students (South Africa Government, 2020). At the UFS, only final-year medical and nursing students returned

to campus. When the country moved to level 3 lockdown, students who needed clinical and laboratory training returned, but up to 33% of campus capacity. From levels 2 to 1, other categories of students, including those that faced extreme difficulties studying at home, returned, but up to 66% of campus capacity. Students who lived in off-campus accommodation, though not in the selected category, were allowed to return to the province with permits (UFS, 2020a). Off-campus accommodation is not university-owned or managed by the university (UFS, 2022). The different lockdown levels severely disrupted academic programmes, residence life, and residence heads.

Residence Life (RL) is a division responsible for the overall experience of students residing in campus housing while at the university (Thomas, 2018). Furthermore, RL facilitates relationships between other students, administration, and academic departments (Dunkel & Bauman, 2013). In RL, students gain experience in leadership, mentorship, residence management, transition into higher education, and campus culture (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). Moreover, there is peer support, mentors, tutors, even access to Wi-Fi in RL (Benjamin & Chatriand, 2008). Hence, residence heads are crucial in bringing these overall experiences together.

Residence heads manage all the activities and operations in the residences and create a sense of belonging, which provides a feeling of acceptance, security, and support for all students. They maintain a healthy community environment, oversee the residences along with housing facilities and maintenance staff, and provide guidance to the residence student leaders (Bawa, 2020). Furthermore, residence heads collaborate and maintain efforts towards promoting student success with other structures within Student Affairs, Housing and Residence Affairs (HRA), faculties, and other student support offices (Bawa, 2020), and always engage with students (Xulu-Gama, 2019).

Residence heads play important roles in higher education, including providing quality services, programmes that enhance student learning, student leadership training, community service opportunities, health and wellness experiences, etc. The impact residence heads have on students, both academically and developmentally, is essential and central to the higher education mission and enterprise (Scheiber & Ludeman, 2020). Residence heads serve as guides for students, ushering them from the unknown to the known (Groenewald & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019).

During the pandemic, residence heads managed the crisis, and effective communication was key. This crisis communication provided all affected with information that was consistent and honest throughout. A crisis can have negative consequences and lead to confusion, anxiety, and instability (Coombs, cited in Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018). In times of crisis, Student Affairs plays a role in ensuring that students' basic needs are adequately supported (Adjei et al., 2021). This was the case at the UFS during COVID-19.

In response to the pandemic crisis, universities established task forces and subcommittees including academics, human resources, facility management, health units, and student affairs. These structures met frequently to make informed pandemic-related decisions as the situation evolved (Sahu, 2020). UFS established task forces and committees that included the Teaching and Learning Management Group (TLMG), the

COVID-19 Task Team, and the Vulnerable Students' Task Team. Some residence heads were members of these teams and were responsible for making informed decisions.

Since 2020, studies on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education and student affairs have been undertaken. For example, Dunn-Coetzee et al. (2021) report on the necessity of developing tailored programmes that could mitigate risks through various interventions at the institutional and faculty levels and emphasised the need of providing the necessary infrastructure. Mutambisi et al. (2021) report on different challenges in the higher education environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that residence heads should be provided with adequate resources and lifelong learning opportunities and be re-oriented in their roles. Schreiber et al. (2021) highlight the importance of integrating student affairs into institutional processes such as teaching, living, and learning spaces because student affairs plays a supportive role and mediated, mitigated, facilitated, and improved student learning and success. Kanyumba and Shabangu (2021) purport that in some institutions, there were no clear systems and proper directives regarding COVID-19 regulations for the phased return of students to residences. This void created challenges for residence heads.

These studies focused on the experiences of students and teaching and learning, but not much on residence heads during COVID-19. The current study provides reflections on the experiences and responses of residence heads and recommendations that can be used by RL, Student Affairs, and institutions during future pandemics or similar times of crisis.

Context of Student Affairs and Residence Life

In 2020, the Student Affairs structure at the UFS was represented in the Rectorate, led by the deputy vice-rector of Student Affairs, with several portfolios. These included the dean of students, with various units, counselling, Centre for Universal Access and Disability Services, student governance, student life and Residence Life. RL is managed by an assistant director, who is a line manager for residence heads and is responsible for all student development programmes, residence activities and operations.

The Student Representative Council (SRC) reports directly to the student governance office. The prime represents the residence students through the executive official of the SRC, and the chairperson of the primes has a seat in the SRC. RL coordinates the residence committee (RC), with a prime as the leader of the RC. The operation of the residences is within HRA and managed by a senior director, who collaborates with RL.

The context above indicates that residence heads function, support, and network within different Student Affairs structures, who provide services mainly when students are on campus. Hence, during the pandemic, residence heads had to interact with almost all structures and sometimes assume different roles, such as academic support.

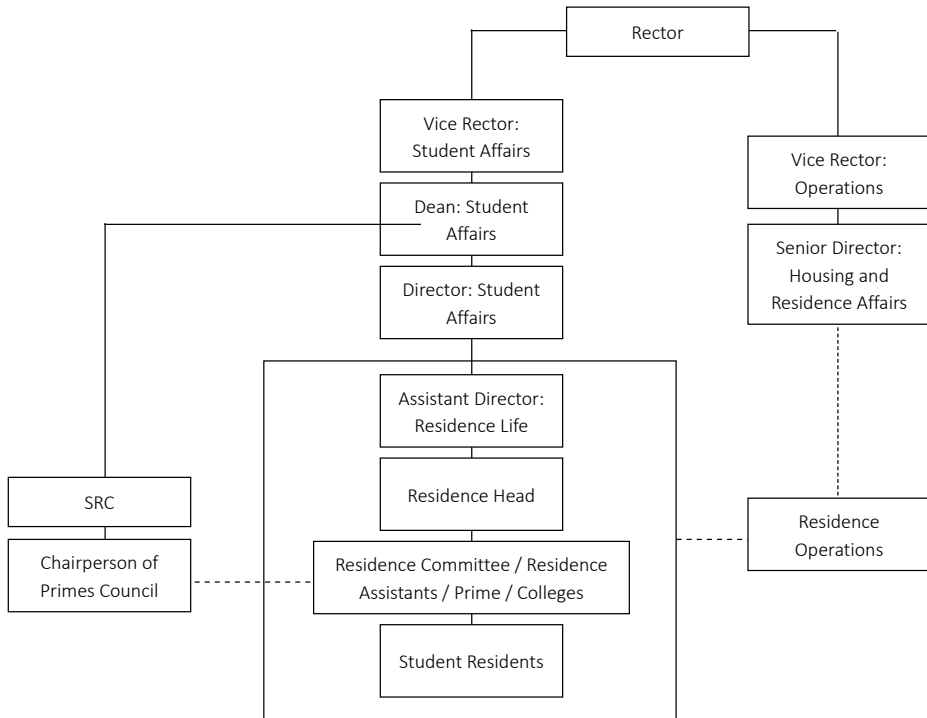


Figure 1: UFS Student Affairs strategic direction and organizational structure (UFS, 2020b)

Categories, roles, and practices of residence heads

At the UFS, there are two types of residence models, namely day residences and on-campus residences. Day residences create a platform for students who stay in off-campus accommodation to participate in all activities in the same manner as on-campus-residence students. A campus venue called a gazelle, is allocated for off-campus students, creating possibilities for these students to gather and participate in different student development opportunities. The on-campus residences are built by the university on the university grounds.

There are three residence-head appointments: (i) on-campus primary positions are appointed full-time to manage the residence and coordinate a specific student development programme, such as mentorship, marketing, health and wellness; (ii) on-campus secondary positions are full-time employees of the university, appointed primarily in either support or academic services, and perform their residence-head responsibilities after hours and over weekends; (iii) day-residence secondary positions commute and manage and coordinate residence activities during the day. On-campus residence heads stay in an apartment attached to the students' residence building.

The context above indicates that different categories of residence heads have different roles and responsibilities for different categories of students at the UFS. In

2020, there were 23 on-campus residence heads, of which 17 were primary and 6 secondary positions. There were seven day residences, and all were secondary positions. Therefore, their proximity to students influenced their experiences and responses during the pandemic.

Methodology

Reflective scholarship of practice as methodology in student affairs

Reflection occurs when practitioners reflect-in-action on a case (in this study, COVID19) that is unique and pay attention to phenomena according to intuitive knowledge, thus allowing them to cope with unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations (Schön, 1987). Reflection is not always easy because some experiences are challenging and difficult to conscientiously think through (Sellars, 2013). Perhaps the residence heads at the UFS experienced this as they tried to cope with indefinite challenges of managing residences during the pandemic.

The main research question for this reflective contribution was: What were the experiences, responses, and recommendations for the future practice of the residence heads during COVID-19?

Drawing on Morgan's (2012) *Improving the student experience*, Luescher (2018) proposed a template for the structure and key components of a reflective practice article. Hence, this reflective article is structured according to the following key components: (i) Student Affairs and RL; (ii) description of the categories, roles, and practices of residence heads; (iii) reflections on residence heads' practices by focusing on their experiences and responses during the COVID-19 pandemic; and (iv) residence heads' recommendations for future practice.

To elicit more data, a qualitative approach was followed that incorporates an interpretive paradigm focusing on recognising and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions (Botma et al., 2010; Fossey et al, 2002). A focus group discussion (FGD) was used as a data collection technique, thus allowing interaction of the group members to provide perspectives and formulation of answers to the research question (Patton, 2002).

Data collection

Residence heads at the UFS were contacted via email, provided with an information document, and invited to participate in the study. A FGD guide was used to facilitate discussions. During the discussions, probing questions were asked to further guide and direct the participants toward responses that would elicit their experiences during the COVID-19 period. The FGD was conducted virtually on a Microsoft Teams meeting to adhere to COVID-19 regulations.

The target population for the study included all 30 (23 on-campus and 7 off-campus) residence heads using purposeful sampling. Because of the small population of 30, all residence heads were invited to volunteer and participate in the study as they fulfilled their roles in the residences during the pandemic. Only those who volunteered participated in the study. Eventually, 10 participated in the FGD, which, according to

Hennik et al. (2019), is an acceptable number. Of the 10 participants, 6 were female, 4 male, 5 Black, 4 White, 1 Coloured, and comprised 7 on-campus and 3 off-campus residence heads.

A pilot study was done with two residence heads using Microsoft Teams to determine whether the questions in the interview guide would provide relevant responses. The goal of the pilot was also to get an impression of the kind of approach and questioning that would work best, the facilitation process, and duration of the discussion. Since there were no major changes to the interview questions after the pilot, the data obtained during the pilot study were used as part of the main investigation (Breen, 2006).

Data analysis

In line with data analysis in qualitative research, an iterative approach and emerging design were used to analyse the data. The data analysis did not have to wait until all the data had been collected (Botma et al., 2010). The verbatim transcripts of audio-recorded discussions done by a trained transcriber were printed and used as field notes, thus ensuring that they accurately reflected the participants' responses. During the analysis, the participants' words were noted by revisiting the audio recording and rereading the transcripts. Attention was given to non-verbal actions such as coughing, the lengths of pauses, emphasis, and tone of voice, thus allowing the interpretation of the actions during the analysis. The interview guide was used to assign preliminary codes, categories were created to identify patterns of similarities and differences, and a coding sheet was developed. Thereafter, themes and subthemes were developed. Thick excerpts from the textual evidence are provided to enhance credibility (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Notably, the authors, who are also experienced residence heads, used their insights during the identification of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings from the FGD regarding participants' experiences and responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and the recommendations participants made during the discussion. The first columns of Tables 1 and 2 represent the categories and the second columns represent the main and subthemes identified during coding.

Reflections on the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

Table 1 presents the experiences of participants during each level of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Table 1: Experiences of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic

Level	Experiences
First notice by the institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Fear • Uncertainty • Concern • Hope
Level 5 Return of Cuban-trained and final-year Health Sciences students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shock • Disbelief • Anxiety and worry • Some relief and contentment • Panic
Level 4 33% of students allowed back on campus. Return of other Health Sciences students, including Natural and Agricultural Sciences students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less fear and anxiety
Levels 3 and 2 66% of students allowed back on campus, including vulnerable students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Communication from RL • Concerns • Frustrations and conflict
Level 1 Maintenance of 66% capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed emotions • Anxiety • Uncertainty and confusion • Despondence

Table 1 shows all participants experienced different levels of anxiety during all levels of the lockdown. When the university announced the discontinuation of academic programmes and closure of residences, participants were anxious about their roles in the empty residences and possible unemployment, as one participant highlighted: *“What is our role as res heads if we are busy managing empty spaces?”* When academic programmes resumed online, participants stated they were worried about students who had left their books in their residences. During level 4, there was less anxiety. One participant said: *“We had health care professionals who are informed about COVID and were on call, most of them – we didn’t have to worry about them.”* However, the anxiety persisted in levels 3 and 2 when some students and staff were infected with COVID-19. One participant shared: *“I had a family member with comorbidities and was super worried about him.”*

During Level 1, there was anxiety about students whose home circumstances did not allow them to study but still could not return to campus. One participant recalled how *“some vulnerable students couldn’t cope at home. They kept on applying to come back but were unsuccessful”*. This was another anxiety related to non-adherence to COVID-19 regulations by students and the different placement of students in residences.

As expected, there was fear, shock, disbelief, and panic during the different lockdown levels. The first group of students allowed back on campus during level 5 comprised of all final-year Health Sciences students, including 52 medical students who were trained in Cuba but had to return to South Africa to complete their final year of study and be integrated into the South African health care system. There was panic, especially in receiving the Cuban-trained students, as revealed by one participant: *"What am I going to do with these 52 people?"*; and disbelief: *"Is this really happening?"*

Despite the negative emotions, there was hope at the beginning that *"they will come back soon"* and some relief and contentment during Level 5. Interestingly, one participant said: *"to be honest, I was happy to be alone with my family in peace; I had time to relax and not deal with breakages and discipline of students."*

Notably, there was concern for first-year students, who had only been at university for six weeks and had just begun adjusting when the university announced closure. One participant highlighted: *"Just as they're about to start settling and how the university works, then boom, the big announcement they need to pack and go."* During levels 3 and 2, there was concern about students' well-being, especially those who had lost loved ones, were infected with COVID-19, had to be isolated or quarantined, and could not cope with the academic demands. Residence heads expected more communication regarding the pandemic and regulations from the RL office. The lack of and/or poor communication from other university structures led to frustration and some conflict.

The data show that the participants experienced anxiety, frustration, conflict, uncertainty, and confusion, especially during levels 3, 2, and 1. Most of this was caused by a lack of or poor and/or confusing communication from and with the national government, institution, faculties, and other departments, which thus led to ineffective functioning in the residences. For instance, there were daily changes to protocols regarding the placement of students in the residences; teaching and learning; and national, local, and university COVID-19 regulations. Because of the different communication channels created, students relied on the residence heads to provide the most accurate and up-to-date information, thus putting more pressure on the residence heads. As one participant remarked: *"At some stage, I felt that faculty was not doing justice to the residence heads through HRA."*

At different levels, participants experienced mixed emotions about social distancing, COVID-19 cases, and accommodating different cohorts of students in their residences.

Reflections on the responses during the COVID-19 pandemic

Table 2 presents the responses of the participants during the different levels of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Table 2: Responses of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic

Level	Responses
First notice by the institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscientise students about COVID-19 • Communication • Helping students • Questions and answers • Public and private responses
Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching out and communicating with students • Helping/supporting students • International students • Liaison with stakeholders
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and engagement • Workshops
Levels 3 and 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Adherence to COVID-19 protocols
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Adherence to COVID-19 protocols

Table 2 shows that participants regarded communication as the most important response during all levels. Although this presented as a novel situation to everybody, after the institution’s announcement, the residence heads had to respond appropriately and correctly to various questions from students. One participant said: *“I told them about the seriousness of the pandemic and [that] at that stage we need to consider their safety first.”* It was important to rely on official communication and take advice from the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) and Higher Health, to allay anxieties and fears. One participant referred to the public versus private response: *“we react publicly in front of students, where we always have to be a source of direction with positive vibes, but I was, joh!, going through a moment at the same time anxious.”*

From level 5, communication focused on who, according to government and university directives, was allowed to return, whether residence student leaders and/or National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funded students. Different communication platforms, such as SMS, WhatsApp, Blackboard, and phone calls were used for certain students. Although communication from different stakeholders was confusing and conflicting at the beginning, it became clearer from level 4, because more information about the pandemic and regulations was available.

Adhering to COVID-19 protocols was key, one participant stated: *“we literally had to paste the whole residence with communication posters, you know, that says, ‘sanitise and wear your mask’.”* Residence heads had to apply discipline for non-adherence to regulations, as indicated by the following phrase: *“We had to be strict, you know, some were fined, we really can’t say, they had to do community services.”*

One participant stated that it was commendable that the university offered different training arranged by the campus health centre, Higher Health, and Counselling Services.

During training, more information about the pandemic, protocols, and compliance was provided, thus improving communication.

As mentioned by a participant, residence heads were expected to assume academic positions by communicating academic information and addressing the academic concerns of students too. This required liaison with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and faculties, regarding Blackboard online learning, Global Protect³, and class timetables.

Recommendations for future practice

Participants offered the following recommendations for the UFS during the FGD:

1. Institutional

During a pandemic outbreak, or similar crisis, universities should first prioritise the return of vulnerable students to campus who may not be able to study effectively at home due to their socio-economic backgrounds. Second, there should be a system for academic support that includes provision of data and electronic devices to support online learning. Third, communication from different stakeholders to staff and students should be clear and timeous. Lastly, during crises, there must be integrated planning between all departments, faculties, and Student Affairs, using effective platforms, as reiterated by Adjei et al. (2021).

2. Student Affairs

The dean should establish effective communication platforms and strategies with all the functional areas of Student Affairs, including RL. There should be proper consultation with different departments, thus enhancing clear lines of communication, as suggested by Zamoum and Gorpe (2018).

3. Residence Life

All participants recommended that RL must consider different activities and the workload of the different categories of on- and off-campus residence heads, as purported by McCarthy (2021). Moreover, compliance protocols, guided by health experts, should be established and, in consultation with residence heads, proper and quality personal protective equipment and resources should be provided.

Conclusion

Residence heads have been perceived to be flexible in terms of their abilities to fulfil different roles. During the pandemic, they even had to phone students to determine how they were coping with online learning, data, connectivity, and home environments, which often included providing social, emotional, and psychological support, which is not in their job description (Bawa, 2020; Scheiber & Ludeman, 2020). According to the findings, during the pandemic, the roles of residence heads at the UFS, who were essential workers and provided extraordinary services, were undervalued compared to

3 Global Protect is an app that was made available for students to access academic resources at no cost. Students could access different academic sites and university programmes using their electronic devices.

health care practitioners, who were regarded as heroes and frontline workers. The study thus provided insights into the valuable role that residence heads played during the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, the study afforded opportunities for Student Affairs and RL to reflect on and reimagine the practices of residence heads and the support offered to these practitioners during crises. Although this study was limited to one institution, the recommendations may apply to other institutions during future pandemics.

Limitations

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, the participation of some residence heads was limited, and data collection engagements were conducted virtually. The collection of data during the FGD was compromised because the interviewer had limited control over the full participation of participants, who might have been focusing on other duties.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the residence heads who participated in this study, and Dr Alet Olivier for scholarly and editorial preparation of the manuscript.

Ethics statement

Approval for this research study was obtained from the General/Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the UFS. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Dean: Student Affairs.

Potential conflict of interest

The authors report no conflict of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of this article.

Funding acknowledgement

No funding was received for the research.

References

- Adjei, M., Pels, N. N. A., & Amoako, V. N. D. (2021). Responding to COVID-19: Experiences of Ashesi University's Student Affairs team. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 135–156. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1433>
- Bawa, A. (2020). Introduction. In R. B. Ludeman & B. Schreiber (Eds.), *Student affairs and services in higher education: Global foundations, issues, and best practices*. A publication of the International Association of Student Affairs and Services – IASAS. Published in cooperation with Deutsches Studentenwerk – DSW. https://www.iasas.global/_files/ugd/c4a890_a07be032660b4a42bf14f3d1ba03da09.pdf?index=true
- Benjamin, M., & Chatriand, C. M. (2008). The role of residence life programs in recruitment, retention and transition. In W. J. Zeller (Ed.), *Residence life programs and the new student experience* (Monograph no. 5, 3rd ed., pp. 7–14). University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Botma, Y., Greeff, M., Mulaudzi, F., & Wright, S. (2010). *Research in health sciences*. Pearson.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

- Breen, L. (2006). A practical guide to focus-group research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 30(3), 463–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260600927575>
- Dunkel, N., & Bauman. J. (2013). *Campus housing management: Past, present and future*. (Vol. 1). Thomson-Shore, Inc.
- Dunn-Coetzee, M., Sinclair, E., Lyner-Cleophas, M., Brink, J., Timmey, M., & Davids, C. (2021). Adaptation of student support services considering COVID-19: Adjustments, impact, and future implications. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 157–166. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1435>
- Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36, 717–732. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.01100.x>
- Groenewald, J., & Fourie-Malherbe, M. (2019). Residence heads as intentional role-players in promoting student success. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 7(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v7i2.3821>
- Hennik, M., Kaiser, B. N., & Weber, M. B. (2019). What influences saturation? Estimating sample sizes in focus group research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 29(10), 1483–1496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318821692>
- Kanyumba, B., & Shabangu, N. (2021). The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and the living and learning spaces at a South African university. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 93–105. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1430>
- Ludemann, R. B., & Scheiber, B. (2020). *Student affairs and services in higher education: Global foundations, issues, and best practices*. A publication of the International Association of Student Affairs and Services – IASAS. Published in cooperation with Deutsches Studentenwerk – DSW. <https://iasas.global/student-affairs-services-in-higher-education-global-foundations-issues-and-best-practices>
- Luescher, T. M. (2018). Quality enhancement in student affairs and social justice: A reflective case study from South Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 6(2), 65–83. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v6i2.331>
- McCarthy, C. (2021). Leading during COVID-19 crisis reaps valuable lessons learned. *Student Affairs Today*, 3(24), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1002/say.30911>
- Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018) Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091>
- Mutambisi, S., Mursi, D. D., & Mazodze, C. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student affairs practitioners: A reflective case study from Bindura University of Science Education in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 183–195. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1437>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd edn.). Sage.
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to corona virus disease (COVID-19): Impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4), e7541. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.7541>
- Scheiber, B., & Ludemann, R. B. (2020). Life in the time of COVID-19: Overview. In R. B. Ludemann & B. Scheiber (Eds), *Student affairs and services in higher education: Global foundations, issues, and best practices*. A publication of the International Association of Student Affairs and Services – IASAS. Published in cooperation with Deutsches Studentenwerk – DSW. https://www.iasas.global/_files/ugd/c4a890_a07be032660b4a42bf14f3d1ba03da09.pdf?index=true

- Schreiber, B., Luescher, T. M., Perozzi, B., & Moscaritolo, L. B. (2021). Student affairs and services during COVID-19 in Africa: Mitigating the pandemic's impact on student success. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 1–21. <https://doi/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1425>
- Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Jossey Bass.
- Sellars, M. (2013). *Reflective practice for teachers*. Better World Books.
- South Africa Department of Health (DoH). (2020). *About COVID-19 (Coronavirus)*. <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/information-about-the-virus-2>
- South Africa Government. (2020). *Disaster Management Act: Regulations: Alert level 4 during Coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown*. <https://www.gov.za/documents/disaster-management-act-regulations-alert-level-4-during-coronavirus-covid-19-lockdown-1>
- Thomas, I. J. (2018). *The 24/7 student affairs professional: A study of how residence directors make meaning of wellness*. College of Professional Studies, North Eastern University.
- University of the Free State (UFS). (2020a). *Reintegration plan: Return of students and staff to all campuses during national lockdown alert levels 4 to 2 (phases I, II, III and IV)*. DIRAP. https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/covid19/final-ufs-return-to-campus-strategy_28-may-2020
- University of the Free State (UFS). (2020b). *Residence manual. Division of Student Affairs*. University of Free State.
- University of the Free State (UFS). (2022). *Off campus accommodation policy*. University of the Free State. [https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/policy-documents-documents/ufs-off-campus-accomodation-\(w\).pdf?sfvrsn=15145220_0](https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/policy-documents-documents/ufs-off-campus-accomodation-(w).pdf?sfvrsn=15145220_0)
- Xulu-Gama, N. (2019). The role of student housing in student success: An ethnographic account. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 7(2), 15–25. <https://doi/10.24085/jsaa.v7i2.3822>
- Zamoum, K., & Gorpe, T. S. (2018). Crisis management: A historical and conceptual approach for a better understanding of today's crises. In K. Holla, M. Titko & J. Ristvej (Eds), *Crisis management – Theory and practice*. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.76198>

How to cite:

Jama, M. P., & Malefane, P. (2024). Reflective perspectives of residence heads' experiences and responses during COVID-19 at a Free State university, South Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 12(1), 145–158. DOI: 10.24085/jsaa.v12i1.4322.