

Editorial Note

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A call was made in 2022 for the submission of articles that were meant to be part of a special issue focusing on “disrupting the norm: rethinking curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment and student support in a post-COVID-19 higher education developing context”. Articles accepted for publication under this theme were since published in various volumes of the Journal, viz. volume 42, 43 and the forthcoming volume 44.

To a large extent, COVID-19 caught many institutions off-guard (both contact and distance education) as most had to prepare staff and students for remote teaching and learning at very short notice, convert course content to an online teaching and learning mode, and ensure staff and students have the necessary tools for the trade. Articles targeted for this theme reflect on authors’ experiences of remote teaching and learning, ranging from staff and student readiness, delivery of course content, student support and assessment.

Subban et al., in their article entitled: “Student Support for Online Learning at the UKZN: A Psychological Readiness and Student Satisfaction Perspective”, tackle the level of students’ readiness for online learning as well as the efficacy of online learning. Their paper illustrate the importance of supporting students to increase their level of readiness for online learning. To achieve this, some of the strategies outlined in their paper include the use of virtual and augmented reality, the adoption of blended learning and pedagogies that are suitable for online teaching and learning.

The articles by Engelbrecht, Makgaka, Ellis and Ndlovu present some of the student support initiatives associated with remote teaching and learning. Engelbrecht’s paper is entitled: “Opportunity and the Pandemic: Reimagining Business Management Curriculum for First-Year Generation Students Under Cover of Pandemonium”. Concerned about first-generation university students’ transition from high school to university, Engelbrecht argues for the demystifying of the student-customer and learner-initiate process. He illustrates how the first-year introductory module in management principles, offered to students registered for commerce and humanities degree programmes, was redesigned for remote teaching and learning to achieve this. In her

UNISA 
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL
PRESS

Progressio

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/Progressio>

Volume 43 | 2022 | #14472 | 2 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-5895/14472>

ISSN 2663-5895 (Online), ISSN 0256-8853 (Print)

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paper entitled: “Optimizing Student Support Using TippyTube during Lockdown in Open and Distance Learning Environment: Undergraduate Students’ Views”, Makgakga discusses the use of TippyTube videos to optimise student support among first-year students enrolled for a mathematics education module. She argued that using this technology assisted in minimising Moore’s concept of Transactional Distance, thus encouraging students’ engagement with content and encouraging flexibility in the course structure. Ellis and Ndlovu, in their paper entitled: “Disrupting Norms: Reflections on the Challenges and Response Strategies in a Marketing Programme due to COVID-19”, propose strategies that will address challenges of limited infrastructure, electricity shortages and power cuts, connectivity and internet access problems, work-life balance, competency and lack of student participation and engagement in online learning. Some of the strategies outlined in their paper include the use of participation diaries, business simulations, reflective reports, discussion forums and online activities, as well as multiple communication avenues.

Fouche and Singh, Naidoo, Mtapuri, Petrus, Gibson and Arek-Bawa focused their attention on the complexities and challenges of assessment during remote teaching and learning. In his paper entitled: “Reverse Thinking for Forward Learning: The Online Reverse Video Challenge as a Conceptual Alternative to Simulated Work-Integrated Learning,” Fouche addresses the challenge that was brought about by COVID-19 in teaching simulated work-integrated learning (WIL). He demonstrates how an online reverse video challenge was developed and used as an alternative to remote assessment that uses simulated WIL. His paper also illustrates how the technology incorporated some notable technological challenges. The last article by Singh et al., entitled: “Investigating Online vs. In-Person Learning on Student Performance”, navigate the complexities of online assessment. They demonstrate how the challenges inherent in the use of technology amongst students from low socio-economic status tend to exacerbate and negatively affect student performance.

The articles converge on common challenges affecting online learning, most especially under conditions of emergency remote teaching and learning. While COVID-19 may have come and gone, it has left an indelible mark on modes of teaching and learning, creating opportunities for the innovative use of technology. In particular, institutions that have been primarily accredited to offer contact teaching now have the opportunity to explore the use of blended learning as a way of enhancing students’ learning experiences. In some institutions, the possibility of using online learning offers a solution for student protests, the intention of which is to disrupt the academic programme.