Chapter 3
Student Engagement in Online Teaching in South African Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses student engagement in an online teaching platform at South African universities. Online teaching and learning have expanded drastically in South Africa during the outbreak of COVID-19 despite few universities offering online teaching before the pandemic. The author found that most historically Black universities were affected mostly to offer online teaching and learning. This is because they lack access to social media platforms and information communication technology. While students from historical white universities enjoy access to data to conduct online teaching and learning, most students were discouraged to continue online teaching and learning because they felt isolated and fewer resources were allocated to online teaching activities. This chapter recommends the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa bridge the gap between rural and urban students by ensuring that all students are allocated data in order to embark on school assessments and homework.

INTRODUCTION

Students engaged in online learning. Student engagement is in a form of sharing information. Students share information amongst their peers' groups, lectures, and

professors. Information is shared as a form of feedback during student assessment. Students engaged through collaboration in various online platforms such as social media, i.e., WhatsApp, video conferencing to achieve learning. A study by Chakraborty and Nafukho (2014) categorizes students' engagement as creating and maintaining a positive learning environment, building a learning community, giving feedback, and practicing flexibility using information communication technology to deliver content. Online learning provides opportunities for students to discuss course materials. Online teaching requires the participation of professors to ensure its success. However, this chapter concentrates on student engagement because students are the main contributor to the online teaching and learning system. Online teaching and learning are necessary especially during this period of COVID 19 wherein the majority of students are not expected to attend face-to-face teaching. This means that teaching online increases all levels in South Africa. This study is also significant because it serves as a guide for South African universities to develop online framework education. Other universities may learn from this study to develop similar online teaching and learning materials.

Research examining online teaching and learning student engagement is limited in South Africa. There was a limited number of South African public universities offering online teaching and learning. Therefore, universities are required to adopt a learning management system because of the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, universities are required to offer online training to meet the objectives of education (Hashemi, 2021). A study conducted by Silver (2007) states that establishing online teaching was a challenge to most universities because of a lack of data to access information communication technologies. These challenges led the Association of African Universities (AAU) to initiate a project to provide universities, academics, and students in Africa to access a low-data online learning management system to provide support amid migration to online teaching (Kigotho, 2021). The AAU launched a learning management system to serve universities by developing remote learning tools for both academics and students. The author is of the view that providing online teaching and learning activities would have challenges for students and lecturers and professors because providing online teaching and learning is a new method for both students, lecturers, and professors. There is limited education provided through an online system. Therefore, there is a need to fill the gap of online learning by researching student engagement in online teaching. It is noted that while the literature increases teaching and learning, there is limited research on the role of student engagement in online teaching. Previous research shows that online learning is conducted voluntarily.

One of the questions asked by the author was whether students participated in online teaching in South Africa. Therefore, online teaching and learning are necessary for universities to be competitive and economically viable (Karaman

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