

Connectivity Issues: The Challenges of Emergency Remote Teaching in a Developing Economy

Topics: Student learning

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Abstract

When the South African government announced a strict national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, students at the University of Cape Town were evacuated from residences and left private accommodation to return home. For many, this implied a return to circumstances that were not conducive to learning. The University did what it could, and distributed data, devices, and hardcopy materials to students unable to properly participate online. Despite this, poor connectivity in rural areas and challenging domestic contexts loomed large as educators were left scrambling to teach students beyond their reach. This paper overviews some solutions to the challenges of developing teaching materials that could stand up to the paradox of an online course presented to students who were not fully online. Although UCT's Law Faculty has continued to teach fully online in 2021, students are allowed to return to residences and connectivity concerns and other personal circumstances won't hinder teaching and learning to the same extent. However, this poster will argue that the disruptions of 2020 prompted innovations that can continue to support students in future, that may work to address inequalities in the classroom, and that may be of value to institutions in South Africa and other developing economies where universities lack the infrastructure to ensure effective online participation.

Keywords: low-data teaching, online learning, blended learning