Covid-19: Interdisciplinary Explorations of Impacts on Higher Education

Editors:

Tennyson Mgutshini, Kunle Oparinde and Vaneshree Govender

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COVID-19 HIGHLIGHTS INEQUALITIES BETWEEN HISTORICALLY BLACK AND HISTORICALLY WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

A comparative analysis

Victor H Mlambo and Nduduzo C Ndebele

Introduction

Under apartheid, higher education in South Africa was skewed in ways designed to entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white minority. The Bantu Education Act of 1952 for example, ensured that black South Africans received an education that would limit their educational potential and thus, remain in the working class. However, Case, Marshall, McKenna and Mogashana (2018) lament how apartheid had developed a two-tier higher education system in the country. The first tier was for the privileged and the haves; they were afforded to study in universities that were from a developmental perspective prioritised by the apartheid regime. These institutions were characterised by the availability of infrastructure, human capital, and were mostly located in metropolitan areas. The second tier was to cater for the previously disadvantaged, mostly the African population (black South Africans, Indians and coloureds). Their location was away from the metropolis, they were structurally challenged, and were not viewed from the same confines as their white counterparts (Case et al, 2018).

South Africa has 11 historically black universities that played a crucial role in shaping the development of the higher education sector in the country. These are: The University of Bophuthatswana – recently renamed the North-West University

(NWU); the University of Durban-Westville (UDW); the University of Fort Hare; the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA); the University of the North-Turfloop (main branch); the University of the North-Qwaqwa; the University of Transkei; the University of Venda (UNIVEN); Vista University; the University of the Western Cape (UWC); and the University of Zululand (Unizulu) (Badat, Barron, Fisher, Pillay & Wolpe, 1994 in Subotzky, 1997). When apartheid ended in 1994, there were 36 higher education institutions in the country. Of this number, ten were historically disadvantaged universities and seven historically disadvantaged technikons which were solely meant for the use of black South Africans (Bunting, 2006:35), while ten historically advantaged universities and seven historically advantaged technikons were designated for the exclusive development of white South Africans. Two distance learning institutions catered for all races.

However, more than two decades after the end of apartheid and the consolidation of multiparty politics in South Africa, Carolissen and Bozalek (2017:346) explain that the higher education sector, like other levels of education, has been, and continues to be, deeply affected by its apartheid past. The author reveals that despite the existence of national documents such as the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion, the education landscape has not considerably changed and remains skewed with historically white universities still at the apex in terms of research and development, and teaching and learning. Carolissen and Bozalek (2017:347) further attest that even today, the concept of dualism in higher education still exists, i.e. institutions and academic developments associated with whiteness are normatively considered excellent and desirable; in this case universities. The converse is conceptual blackness where institutions and practices associated with blackness are normatively considered to be mediocre and less desirable. For Bozalek and Boughey (2012) this mismatch between the higher education sector today is largely because apartheid impacted the higher education system in numerous ways. Not only were separate institutions for black and white population groups established, but the programs these different kinds of institutions could offer were also defined by apartheid beliefs about the roles considered appropriate for different social groups.

It is with this contention that this chapter argues that Covid-19 has, to a great extent, laid bare the structural inequalities that exist between historically black universities (HBUs) and historically white universities (HWUs) in South Africa. The chapter, therefore, seeks to examine how HBUs and HWUs have responded to the raging pandemic.

Methodological issues

To gain a deeper understanding of this subject matter, this chapter first seeks to systematise the existing empirical literature on HBUs, HWUs and Covid-19. By addressing existing empirical literature, the chapter provides a sound basis for a more evidence-based discussion of this highly-debated issue. However, the chapter takes into consideration that Covid-19 is a recent issue, hence there are still few empirical studies that have been done to effectively document the phenomenon within the context of South Africa's higher education sector. Nonetheless, the chapter did its best to synthesise the existing literature (incorporating global examples) to answer the objectives of this chapter. Taking into account the historical debates around the 'un-equality' of South Africa's higher education sector, secondary sources will provide an exhaustive pool of information, hence, aiding the study to reach meaningful conclusions informed by current debates and narratives.

Higher education enrolment in a pre and post-apartheid South Africa

South Africa has 26 public universities with nearly one million students, while 700 000 students are registered at more than 50 higher education training colleges (TVET colleges – Technical Vocational Education Training). An additional 90 000 students can be found at various private institutions (Tjønneland, 2017). The establishment of the South African College in Cape Town in 1829 for people of European descent marked the beginning of tertiary education in South Africa. The apartheid regime, as argued by Raju (2006), was successful in creating a higher education system that was complex and discriminatory. The higher education system of the 1990s consisted of 21 universities, 15 technikons, and a host of colleges including teacher training colleges, agricultural colleges, and colleges of nursing. However, under apartheid, African students were legally prohibited from attending the 19 white higher education institutions and could only enrol in six institutions designated specifically for their use (Bunting, 2006:38-40). In essence, this meant that higher education for blacks was to take place exclusively in the homelands, in colleges that were defined in tribal, as well as racial terms, i.e. Zulus would attend classes with Zulus, Xhosas with Xhosas, and so on for each of the major ethnic groups among South Africa's black majority. Moreover, a HBU was, therefore, more likely to offer nursing rather than medicine and public administration or political philosophy. Under apartheid, research was structured to serve the white population and the need for the security of this group on a continent wracked with wars for independence (Bawa & Mouton, 2001). This segregation created a dual education system that was unequal and unjust. Subscribing to the above, Carolissen and Bozalek (2017:347) argue that the concept of dualism, as reflected by Plumwood (1993), arises when there are two opposites, which are then hierarchised.

For McKeever (2017:117-124), the establishment of English schools in 1902 resulted in the government importing teachers from abroad, and created a structure and curriculum to match the English system of education. This arrangement was rebuffed by many whites in South Africa who did not want a predominantly English curriculum with English as the medium of instruction. Afterwards, disgruntled by the thought of an English curriculum, this group, mostly Afrikaaners but also other whites of non-English descent, set up a parallel system of schooling based on principles known as Christian National Education (CNE) (McKeever, 2017:118). These two parallel systems were developed to serve whites, whereas the third system of education, for black South Africans, coloureds, and Indians, consisted primarily of schools established and run by Christian (usually foreign) missionaries. This segregation ultimately found its way to higher education, where universities were predominately seen as white, whereas those which were meant for blacks were pushed to the confines of rural areas.

The racialisation of higher education ought to achieve one element, restrict quality education for blacks and deepen the divisions among them to preserve the white rule. Rural-based colleges for blacks were not on par with that of their white counterparts, hence the education offered in terms of quality was skewed. The quality of academic programmes and teaching was uneven, as were the qualifications of academics (Rensburg, 2006; cited in Stanfordinmagazine, 2007). While some HBUs can enrol students (and thus earn input subsidy), their ability to earn output subsidy based on graduation and throughput rates is negatively affected because of their inability to provide the sort of intense teaching and support these students need (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Observing this from the realms of Fraser's normative framework on social justice, Bozalek and Boughey (2012) expounded that social arrangements must be such that they allow individuals to participate as equals in the following spheres: economic, cultural, and political. However, within the context of higher education, even though one may be able to vote and participate in social movements, Fraser introduced a second level of representation, which pertained to the aspect of boundary setting. This happens when higher education establishes boundaries that exclude some groups or institutions and includes others, which Fraser terms as mis-framing them. Educational differences created from the apartheid era onward have great importance for understanding continuing inequalities in contemporary South Africa, especially within the context of the black population.

The 1994 democratic elections in South Africa signalled the need for change in the higher education sector. This sector witnessed significant changes in the 1990s as a result of post-apartheid legislation, as well as global and national changes in the economy. Post-apartheid legislation de-radicalised universities and other

institutions in the higher education sector (Raju, 2006). Immediately after this, the higher education sector was a less regulated market atmosphere. However, this deregulation of higher education came with its consequences, for example, it resulted in a widening of gaps in higher education. Exemplifying this, Raju (2006) argued that HWUs and technikons were able to consolidate their leading positions within higher education in the country, whereas HBUs were plagued by administration and governance issues and were losing students in massive numbers. Bozalek and Boughey (2012) explained that the functioning of the higher education sector in the apartheid era was governed and resourced differently. HWUs were given the administrative and financial power to make decisions concerning the spending of government subsidy, the setting of tuition fees, the number of staff to employ, and how any surplus should be invested. This, however, was not the case for HBUs who were considerably more constrained in the decisions they could make. Moreover, budgeting for these HBUs involved gaining approval for expenditure from the controlling government department. This means they did not possess the operational autonomy as their white counterparts, which further impeded their effective functioning.

To address these injustices, firstly, there was the urgent need to increase the enrolment of those who were previously disadvantaged and secondly, there was the need to ensure that HBUs eventually match HWUs in terms of development and educational output. However, what these urgent needs failed to reflect or perhaps take into consideration was that for HBUs to catch up to HWUs, significant investments would be needed. These would range from infrastructure development, human capital provision, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

HBUs during apartheid were poorly funded compared to HWUs. Library facilities were minimal and teaching venues were poorly equipped. One significant feature of black campuses was the architecture that was designed to impede movement in cases of civil unrest. Such poor design continues to impact learning environments to this day (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Nevertheless, South Africa has seen a major expansion of student enrolment. University enrolment (including technikons and teacher training colleges) has increased from about 500 000 in 1994 to 938 201 in 2011 in public universities and universities of technology (Tjønneland, 2017). However, the chapter contends that the increase in student enrolment has not corresponded with the development of HBUs. Twenty-seven years after the demise of apartheid, HBUs are still experiencing problems inherited from the legacies of apartheid. It is with the above deliberation that this chapter argues that Covid-19 has laid bare the inequalities that exist between HWUs and HBUs. This chapter, however, acknowledges that while successive governments (post-1994) have been committed to redressing past injustices within the higher education sector, most of the HBUs

have continued to remain completely black and have not witnessed significant changes that allow them to be on par with their white counterparts. While Covid-19 is just one of many issues that have plagued South Africa's higher education sector, it has, however, allowed one to observe how unequal the higher education system in South Africa continues to be. Post-1994, policy development with regards to higher education in South Africa had to deal with both the need for equity in the higher education sector and the need to prioritise development necessary for South Africa to engage with a rapidly globalising economy coupled with the influence of the internationalisation of higher education (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Mlambo, Ogunnubi & Mlambo, 2020).

Inequality, Covid-19 and higher education in South Africa

Conceptualising the concept of inequality within the context of higher education in South Africa is largely premised on the inability of HBUs to catch up with levels of development attained by HWUs. This was reinforced by Chetty and Knaus (2016), who pointed out that higher education is increasingly racially stratified, and it is particularly apparent in the concentration of black and coloured students at HBUs. Most of the white students attend the HWUs i.e. the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), Stellenbosch University (SU), and the University of Pretoria (UP). These universities, before 1994, catered predominantly for the white minority, and even today, these institutions occupy top positions in local and international research rankings. Moreover, they charge much higher fees than HBUs. In a post-apartheid South Africa, this sadly maintains the class structure of apartheid society (Chetty & Knaus, 2016). Significantly, the long term lack of resourcing and continuing financial struggle appear to have impacted HBUs in other ways.

Access, success and completion rates continue to be racially skewed, with white completion rates being on average 50% higher than that of Africans (Smith, 2013). However, Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argued that the skewed higher education system in South Africa cannot be observed in isolation, rather, there is a need to look at the fragmented public schooling system. Since 1994, the public schooling system is widely acknowledged to have failed, with the result that the majority of schools open to black learners continue to be marked by the sort of conditions characteristic of apartheid. This means that the impoverished nature of the educational experience offered at the secondary level eventually makes its way to higher education.

The 2015 #FeesMustFall protests marked a turbulent year for higher education in South Africa. Students protested against institutions' language policies, high fees, structural inequalities, and colonial symbols. It was poor and working-class youth who drove the protests – a clear indication that it is a class struggle. This is further emphasised by the fact that most of the students who protested, whether during 2015 or on other occasions, were black (Chetty & Knaus, 2016). Race and class lie at the heart of opposition to South Africa's existing exclusive university system. Needless to say, the debates around the #FeesMustFall movement have raised different narratives. Lekaba (2016) argued that the movement missed the opportunity to address imbalances of the past; rather it focused on the vandalism of properties and the violence emerging from the protests. For HBUs, the #FeesMustFall movement was just one of many examples of South Africa's unequal higher education sector (Mlambo, Hlongwa & Mubecua, 2017). Years of student riots and protests have dilapidated infrastructure which has compounded their ability to respond to Covid-19. Even though it was HWUs (with their high fees) that protested the most, some HBUs used this time to vent out their issues. However, media coverage was not evenly distributed, hence HWUs were seen as being at the forefront of the #FeesMustFall movement.

Covid-19 has therefore reinforced the inequalities that exist in South Africa's institutions of higher learning. Apart from racial observations, inequalities also exist in the form of lack of infrastructure in HBUs, the failure to attract and retain students, and the failure to attract skilled human capital. These challenges have existed for decades, but the academic fallout from Covid-19 has laid bare their colossal impact. Highlighting the negative impact of the pandemic, Mamokgethi Phakeng, the Vice-Chancellor of UCT, contended that the pandemic has 'fast-tracked conversations' about online learning (Kelly, 2020). Conversely, the Vice-Chancellor fails to reflect on the inequality that exists among universities in South Africa. Arguably UCT, considering its global reach and levels of development, may be able to manoeuvre quickly and introduce alternative learning systems, however the same cannot be said about HBUs who serve a student base largely from remote areas. However, Phakeng acknowledged that Covid-19 is exposing many of the country's problems as inequality and poverty have become much more pronounced (Kelly, 2020).

Additionally, Petersen (2020) argued that Covid-19 has unearthed inequalities that were not seen as less important, for example online learning systems and the need to incorporate technology in modern-day teaching. However, since 1994, such challenges have been in the public domain especially within the context of HBUs where issues of infrastructure and remote learning systems have always been seen as key challenges. While Covid-19 has had a ripple effect on HBUs, it becomes

cumbersome to make sense of why these universities have not invested in remote eLearning systems. While salvaging the academic year remains a top priority in the higher education sector, salvaging the academic year ought to be underpinned by the need to ensure that no student gets left behind.

The chapter ponders how this will be accomplished as the majority of students in HBUs are contact students. The pandemic, however, has suspended such contact sessions and has forced universities to rethink how they deliver the academic programmes. This has left institutions with little choice, but to embark on wide-scale emergency teaching and learning to salvage the 2020 academic year, which has in most cases been online learning. It is with disputation that this chapter contends that while HBUs do have systems for online learning and support, historically however, they have not sufficiently entrenched them in their curricular of teaching and learning. In essence, the face of higher education in South Africa is a poor, black working-class young person who comes from the townships and villages that do not have the basic infrastructure that students need to function. Also, most households and communities are not conducive spaces for a fulfilling learning experience. Therefore, it becomes evident that the urgent rush to implement online learning in the hope of salvaging the academic year will present significant challenges for HBUs.

Responding to Covid-19 within the context of HWUs and HBUs: The question of teaching and learning

The quest to respond to the crippling effects of Covid-19 on higher education has rested on the following: the need to salvage the 2020 academic year; the need to ensure students, despite being away from campuses, are engaging in teaching and learning processes, and, more importantly, to prepare for the re-phasing of students back to campuses depending on the trajectory of the virus.

Saving the 2020 academic year

Salvaging the academic year is imperative, however, the chapter critiques the formula used to decide how universities ought to go about issuing laptops. The chapter acknowledges that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has been central in the process, however, the prioritisation of the NSFAS-funded students as key recipients of laptops and data bundles fails to reflect that many students are self-funded and are not under any form of sponsorship. This criterion, sadly, goes against the emphasis of not leaving any student behind. Moreover, the National Planning Commission, in its 2011 National Development Plan: Vision for 2030, proposes that the number of PhD graduates per year, which was 1 421 in 2010,

be increased to 5 000 by 2030 (Mohamedbhai, 2012). However, the DHET and by extension many universities, both HWUs and HBUs, have been rather silent about how postgraduates are going to be catered for during this period.

Therefore, the chapter argues that the DHET's focus on the NSFAS-funded students sidelines the purpose of inclusivity, hence concluding that some students will be inevitably left out. Reinforcing this, Tawana Kupe, the Vice-Chancellor of UP as cited by Bothell (2020), argued that the Covid-19 crisis is likely to undermine the progress that South Africa has made post-apartheid in providing equal access to quality higher education. The Vice-Chancellor argued that a significant number of students in the country do not have the devices or stable enough electricity to study online and internet data costs were "very high". In essence, despite the pledge from universities to send laptops and data bundles, the issue of internet connectivity is still a problem; hence sending laptops does not guarantee that students will be able to partake in online learning processes. For HBUs, being able to cater for students who are located in rural areas will be difficult, hence implying the need for alternatives, for example physically delivering learning materials.

Engaging students in teaching and learning processes away from campuses

It becomes imperative for one to understand that the role of Covid-19 in exposing the inequalities in South Africa's higher education sector is not an isolated occurrence. Galvin (2020) noted that the same situation can be observed in the United States of America (USA), where African American, Latin American, and Native American students were educated in wholly segregated universities who are disadvantaged and underfunded. The National Academies and Issues in Science and Technology explained that historically black colleges and universities in the USA have struggled to respond to Covid-19. Such problems are compounded by financial challenges that the pandemic is bringing, a lack of technological set-up for online learning, and a need to help students returning to homes where they may not have had computers or connectivity. Black universities had fewer resources than their white counterparts and the financial structure of many black universities has left them especially vulnerable (Galvin, 2020). However, Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argued that the first issue in comparing educational standards is that we tend to ignore the problem itself, which is the system. In higher education, the first problem is mis-framing in that individual students, lecturers, and institutions, are held accountable for success in higher education endeavours, rather than the entire education system, which is inequitable. The authors argue that systems in HBUs struggle because of poor teaching practices of lecturers, the inadequate mix of programmes and qualifications offered by some institutions, the failure to align curricula, or in mismatches between mission and vision statements and what an institution is doing.

HBUs in South Africa show-case similar characteristics, hence the chapter argues looking at the response patterns between HBUs and HWUs. The latter has been able to take the lead in ensuring a seamless flow of teaching and learning without waiting on government support, nor direction, especially when it comes to online learning preparation; while the former has shown signs of uneasiness and a lack of resolve. One cannot blame HBUs for their lack of resolve, for Subotzky (1997) argued that the government, since 1994, has failed to address the governance problems that have plagued HBUs and these problems have become observable in a time of crisis. In 2009, Professor Jonathan Jansen was appointed as an administrator to head Mangosuthu University of Technology. In November 2011, Walter Sisulu University was placed under administration. In the same year, the University of Zululand was placed under administration for two years. In 2019, maladministration continued unabated as the University of Fort Hare was placed under administration (Hweshe, 2011; Mbanjwa, 2009; News24, 2011).

The above reflects that institutional governance issues have long plagued HBUs. Covid-19 has gone further expose these institutional shortcomings. On the contrary, no HWU was placed under administration in the same period. The chapter, therefore, argues that governance issues, provision of technological systems, sufficient human capital, infrastructure provision, and the location of HWUs have made major differences in how they managed to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. However, contrary to the above view on governance, Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argued that HBUs are struggling today not only because of governance-related issues, but also because of the legacy of apartheid. They were considerably more constrained in the decisions they could make and as such they were not able to build financial reserves. The controlled nature of the budgeting processes meant that the capacity to plan and handle financial resources was not always developed. After apartheid, this legacy had gone on to impact the ability of the HBUs to manage their finances in substantial ways. Hence, several HBUs have been placed under administration in recent years, because of the perceived failure to manage their affairs appropriately. Although corruption cannot be dismissed in such cases, neither can the fact that HBUs were systemically denied the opportunities to develop the capacity to manage their affairs under apartheid.

Nonetheless, it becomes narrow to view the response to Covid-19 within the realms of universities, without considering the location of their student population. That is, HBUs despite their shortcomings have made attempts to reach out to their students, but attempts have been hampered by the location of students. Most HBUs serve rural-based students, hence transporting study materials and laptops to these students may be cumbersome. Moreover, data usage may be hindered by the lack

of telecommunication support in such areas. While HWUs also serve students in rural areas, their well-integrated online learning portals tend to mitigate the lack of communications support. Moreover, Bozalek and Boughey (2012) revealed that location, therefore, impacted academic life by contributing to the social segregation already introduced by apartheid legislation. Post-apartheid, this historical legacy continues to be significant. Universities in remote rural areas are, for example, less likely to attract highly-qualified staff than their HWU counterparts.

The DHET acknowledges that higher education is confronted by the very same inequalities it seeks to address. Institutions have taken a variety of actions to respond to the needs of their students. Sadly, the responses to Covid-19 have laid bare the considerable differences between HWUs and HBUs. Universities such as SU, WITS, UP and UCT have all prioritised the allocation of free data bundles (in collaboration with network providers and support from the DHET) and laptops to students for online teaching during Covid-19 (IOL, 2020; Macupe, 2020; & Shoba, 2020). Notably, these are well-established universities that were predominantly white universities in the apartheid era. HBUs such as the University of Fort Hare, Unizulu, UWC, UNIVEN, and the Walter Sisulu University have indicated that they will also support students, but one cannot deny that without substantial government support, they might have little room to manoeuvre.

The re-phasing of students back to campuses

The DHET argued that to save the academic year, there is a need to gradually phase-in the return of students back to universities. This was to be done in phases and in line with the lockdown levels. Under levels 5 and 4, no students were allowed on campus. Under level 3, 33.3% of students were allowed back to campus, and these were students in the natural sciences and those who needed laboratories and practicals to complete their qualifications (Ngqakamba, 2020). Under level 2, another 33.3% of students were allowed back, bringing the total to 66.6%. Under level 1, all students were allowed to return. Nonetheless, the chapter argues that what the rephasing in process failed to reflect was that not all universities could welcome 66.6% of students back while at the same time maintaining strict Covid-19 regulations (Ngqakamba, 2020). For HBUs, the shortage of residences, congested spaces, and the overcrowding of lecture halls compounds the planned phasing in of students. In HWUs, with infrastructure in place, the process has become seamless, evident by some HWUs already welcoming students back to campus (for example the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)). This again shows the disparity in the higher education sector in South Africa.

Looking at HBUs in the USA, the concept of online learning has become an important element to ensure continuity. However, resembling HBUs in South Africa, DePietro (2020) argued that in the USA, the requisite change to online learning has been challenging for HBUs, especially those campuses that emphasise an intimate college experience. Moreover, with online learning not well integrated, the interaction between lecturers and students affects knowledge generation. Reinforcing this, the European Data Portal (2020) contended that in Europe, while countries are adapting to the 'new normal' with education from a distance, nonetheless, three requirements need to be fulfilled: access to the internet, the right technology, and the skills to use the technology.

Taking this into account, the use of digital content in education worldwide was relatively uncommon before the crisis started. Only 20% of countries had digital learning resources in teaching, while no country has a universal digital curriculum for teaching and learning (European Data Portal, 2020). These revelations highlight three elements from a South African perspective. Firstly, concerning internet access, many students in HBUs access internet services on campus through Wi-Fi hot spots or computer labs. However with Covid-19, students in rural areas may battle for the internet services needed for online learning. Even though the government has arranged for educational websites to be freely accessible even without data, the concept of online learning and its operation is still a barrier for HBUs and their student populace (McKane, 2020). Moreover, the rush to implement online learning has reduced the training time needed for staff, especially in HBUs. Finally, for those who do have access to the internet and the necessary technology, there is evidence that learning online can be more effective. However, for those who do not, this will likely prolong the divide in South Africa's higher education systems.

The following section intends to unpack the transition from face-to-face teaching and learning to online teaching and learning in the institutions of higher learning.

Readiness of higher education institutions for blended learning

Covid-19 is a global phenomenon and will leave no sector in any country in the world unaffected, and its consequences will be felt for years to come (Mohamedbhai, 2012). Although education is becoming a ubiquitous service delivered anywhere and anytime over the global network, higher education institutions have embarked on a journey to implement elements of e-learning in traditional course delivery, to prepare their students, as well as the institution, for the future participation in education (Bonk, 2009; McCradie, 2003). However, the reality is that universities offering contact learning, whether HBUs or HWUs, are not ready for a complete

transition to online teaching and learning. Furthermore, the provision of laptops, data, and delivery of study materials does not guarantee effective teaching and learning. Amid Covid-19, methods and practices of teaching have come under the spotlight as students and lecturers are expected to transit from face-to-face to online remote learning and teaching in a short space of time.

This chapter maintains that there is a considerable gap among institutions of higher learning. Some universities, predominantly the better-resourced universities (HWUs), have been able to carry on with teaching online whereas, in other universities (HBU), students have had to make do with WhatsApp voice audio, YouTube videos, and accessing slides on data free learning websites, such as Moodle. Evidently, within universities, there is also unevenness in the distribution of devices, as not all lecturers possess smartphones or laptops to be able to teach online (Moeng, 2020). As a result, training is required to better equip lecturers for the changes brought by Covid-19 and online pedagogical expertise that many of our lecturers lack. Despite the clear demonstration of the benefits of using technology in education, there continues to be a marked reluctance by academics to engage with online learning (Anderson, 2008). Even though many lecturers from HWUs and HBUs have made efforts with online skills and expert guidance in creating online classrooms on multiple platforms, Becker and Jokivirta (2007:7) found in their study that academics worldwide reported low enthusiasm for using technology in learning.

Throughout the discussion, it becomes observable that Covid-19 has brought numerous challenges for the higher education sector around the world, especially for disadvantaged universities. In Indonesia, online learning faces similar challenges to those in South Africa, for example, only 56% or 150 million of Indonesia's 268 million population have access to the internet and of those who do, many cannot afford unlimited, stable, and speedy connections (Yamin, 2020). Bandwidth and server capacity have also been issues. In Thailand and Cambodia, less than 60% of the population has access to the internet, while only around 40% have access in Myanmar and Vietnam (Jalli, 2020). In Asia, another key issue is how prepared systems, students, and teachers are to adapt to online learning as having the infrastructure in place makes the transition to remote teaching and learning much easier (Jalli, 2020). In Latin America, the response has been similar to that of South Africa (ensuring no one gets left behind and establishing alternative teaching and learning methods), in Costa Rica, hard copy resources have been handed out to students with no access to the internet (Cobo, Hawkins & Rovner, 2020). In El Salvador, a national call centre (accessible via email and WhatsApp) was set up to provide support to students in the delivery of educational activities. In Peru, the government is adopting a strategy to use different channels to distribute content: internet, TV, radio, and phones. In

Paraguay, an agreement with a large technology company was reached to offer an educational package at “zero cost” to benefit 60 000 teachers and 1.2 million students (Cobo et al., 2020).

In Colombia, the strategy combines online, offline and broadcasting. For those families with internet access to “Aprender digital”, a national platform with over 80,000 digital resources organised by grades (in different modalities, such as games, videos, etc.) is available (Cobo et al., 2020). However, Adeotey (2020) argued that the coronavirus pandemic has exposed the unpreparedness of many higher education institutions in Africa to migrate online. While countries such as Egypt, Ghana, South Africa and Rwanda are among those countries who have moved some of their programmes to online platforms and partnered with network providers to zero-rate these platforms, students continue to face several challenges. According to UNESCO, 89% of students in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to household computers and 82% lack internet access (Adeotey, 2020). This means that online classes cannot cater to all students as this has been the case with South Africa’s HBUs.

The effects of Covid-19 on the quality of education provided and the quality of students produced in HBUs/HWUs

The global lockdown of education institutions has caused a major and unequal interruption in students’ learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Educational access has become a noticeable issue during this period of Covid-19. Some students have access to information and technology, particularly those from HWUs, but even then, the process of learning is difficult, including a lack of study space in many homes as rooms are taken up by family members since there is a national lockdown. It is important to understand that access to gadgets (i.e. laptops, smartphones) and information does not always result in learning taking place. Mohamedbhai (2012) cautioned that quality online learning requires that the teaching material is prepared by a professional instructional designer, that the lecturer is pedagogically trained for delivering the programme, and the students are equally exposed to the pedagogy of online learning. The careers of this year’s university graduates may be severely affected by Covid-19.

The interruptions in learning and the untested and unprecedented scale shift to online learning will harm the quality of graduates to be produced in the 2020 academic year. Furthermore, the vast majority of HBUs student enrolments comprise of underprepared black students who have for years depended on face-to-face

lectures. Additionally, in the lens of this chapter, HBUs under the discriminatory and repressive conditions of apartheid are subjected to severe financial and other disadvantages, with the result being that their institutional infrastructure is poor and does not reflect the internationalisation of higher education. In all, this chapter evaluated the educational and structural challenges that are compounding South Africa's higher education sector. More worryingly, however, is the unequal development of universities in South Africa. Undoubtedly, the period of 1994 was meant to radically alter the way higher education was undertaken. There were greater calls for inclusivity, doing away with the racial element in higher education, and promoting a higher education system that was characterised by accessibility and a system that would respond to the challenges of a democratic South Africa. However, 27 years after the consolidation of multiparty politics in South Africa, the higher education sector has been observed as being one of the most unequal sectors in the country. HBUs have failed to catch up to the levels of development that characterise their HWU counterparts. The South African government has realised that HBUs are characterised by governance issues, corruption, and maladministration, all of which have hindered their ability to catch up with HWUs.

Covid-19 has further reflected on these inequalities by laying bare the effects of the unequalness of higher education in South Africa. Students in HBUs are mainly rural-based, lack internet connectivity and are not well entrenched in the concept of online learning. Moreover, academic staff at HBUs are also greatly challenged in terms of online teaching and there has been a general fear that teaching and learning taking place via online platforms will compromise the quality of education offered to students from HBUs. Finally, there have been arguments and debates at the slow pace at which HBUs have integrated online learning in their curricula development. Arguments have contended that while no one expected a sudden halt to higher education owing to the pandemic, HWUs should have long integrated online learning into their curricula development. Unfortunately, this chapter argues that the sudden rush to integrate online learning will impede a staff and the student population that is neither well-trained nor well equipped to make the best use of such, hence, this questions the rationale behind the inability of HBUs to integrate online learning in their curricula.

Recommendations and conclusion

The takeaway point from this discussion rests on the premise that the responses towards Covid-19 will greatly differ between HWUs and HBUs. These differences will be buoyed by the differences in resources and levels of development that differentiate HWUs and HBUs, thus implying that HWUs might have more room to manoeuvre

apart from government intervention. For HBU's there seems to be significant reliance on government support rather than taking the lead in developing mechanisms that ought to ensure the seamless integration to online. However, one ought to take into cognisance that many HBUs are still struggling in terms of ICT support, hence setting up the necessary and student-friendly online portals might take some time, which might inconvenience students and further disrupt the teaching and learning process. However, what gives rise to the different responses to Covid-19 between HBUs and HWUs, and why are HWUs perceived to have manoeuvrability with regards to Covid-19? Covid-19 has exposed the inequalities that currently exist in the South African higher education sector. The consequences have been felt by all sectors in the country and the education sector is no exception. The sector as a whole needs to reflect, recalibrate, and reimagine the best way forward during and beyond Covid-19. The approach must be holistic and multi-dimensional and should involve all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, students, policymakers, researchers, and civil society.

A specific task force on higher education under the leadership of the Departments of Basic Education, Higher Education and Training, and Science and Technology must survey the situation, suggest immediate and short-term measures, and be ready to effect redress when the crisis is over. Additionally, the global community will offer lessons through which South Africa should learn from, especially within the higher education sector. However, going forward the focus must be directed towards gradually developing HBUs. The reality is there is an increasing demand for higher education in South Africa, and coupled with this demand is the need for expansion of higher education institutions. However, the chapter contends that the inequality of higher education needs to be addressed first before such expansion can be consolidated. Moreover, HBUs ought to integrate online learning in their curricula. Sadly implementing it in such a rush will cause more problems rather than solutions. Also, issues of corruption and maladministration ought to be addressed in HBUs, thus enabling conducive teaching and learning environments. This chapter, however, concludes that it will be difficult for HBUs to catch up to their HWU counterparts as they are compounded by a plethora of issues that have multiplied in their appearance, and sadly, these issues have hindered their ability to respond to the pandemic.

Covid-19 demands a swift shift to online learning in higher learning institutions, both HBUs and HWUs. The development and adaptation of new technologies; as well as a sufficient level of absorptive capacity from HBUs (i.e, the ability to adopt new technologies) are required as a core condition for successful leapfrogging. This capacity includes technological capabilities, knowledge, and skills, as well as supportive institutions. There is a range of policies that can be implemented to

develop this capacity. Evidence suggests that a mix of generic functional policies (for example, to strengthen the levels of education) and more specific policies (for example, to stimulate innovation in the education sector) are required. To this end, forming partnerships between institutions of higher learning, both HBUs and HWUs, and the basic education sector, both private and public, is essential and will enable them to share scarce resources, learn innovative educational practices, and apply them from a collaborative perspective. Furthermore, deploying and improving digital infrastructure in HBUs is important. The application of ICT in education necessitates digital equipment and internet access, which has proved to be a cross-cutting enabler for education during the current Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, more effort is needed to train and retrain teachers and ensure that they are appropriately allocated and adapting to technological changes.

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