



## Online Learning Barriers Encountered by University Lecturers in Using Communication Strategies: A Phenomenological Approach

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### ABSTRACT

The intent of the research is to conduct a phenomenological study about the lived experiences of South African university lecturers. The experiences of the lecturers are explored with regard to the online learning barriers encountered when using communication strategies. The Community of Inquiry and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenological framework were employed to comprehend the lecturers' experiences of designing and implementing teaching using online technologies, such as smartphones, emails, SMSs, WhatsApp, Facebook, tutorial letters and discussion forums of the learning management system when communicating with students. In view of the current situation with all the intricacies, deficiencies, and challenges of online teaching and learning, the findings showed that the lecturers' teaching presence is not clearly discernable. Nevertheless, there seem to be attempts by lecturers to ensure that their teaching and social presence are better integrated, albeit in an amorphous manner.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology; Online Communication; Lived Experience; Strategies; Google Forms; WhatsApp

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is perceived as the science that expands our understanding of human lived experience (Husserl, 1970). Brown (2021) argues that phenomenology focuses on the world as lived by a person, not on the world or reality as something separate from the person. Heidegger (1967) invoked the term *Dasein* which means "being their" or "there being" in the world as a way of extending the Husserlian epistemic outlook to include our worldliness, that is, how time and place influence our thinking, behaviour, and actions in the world in which we live. In the modern world, there has been a rapid shift from the real world of physical interaction with others and objects to a non-real world of virtual and technological interactions, also referred to as the screen universe. Therefore, people are increasingly using

technological tools such as e-and-m-mobile applications as they travel or move around to communicate with others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these tools, with their sophisticated web-based online applications, have gained currency in education worldwide as an alternative teaching and learning and communication tool with students.

In an academic context, communication is simply the transfer of information from one person to another, from one group to another, or from a person to a group and vice versa. According to Alawamleh, Al-Twait and Al-Saht (2020), the word communication is derived from the Latin "communis" meaning "common". Therefore, "communication" means "making common", "making known", and "sharing", and it involves both verbal or non-verbal and electronic means of human interaction. No communication occurs unless a

shared understanding emerges from the exchange of information (Brown, 2022). In the university context, e-and-m-mobile technologies have become a significant part of academics' lived world experiences as their mode of communication with students shifted from human-to-human communication to human-to-human via the "screen universe". According to Nisar (2020), when we communicate with others via technological web-based online tools, the lived body transposes into virtual reality.

As the body transposes into a virtual unreal world, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) refer to the human body being turned into a body without organs. This is because in a virtual world, the real and virtual body coalesce in the sensation of a different nature. When we communicate with others via various technological applications, communication becomes distorted as the natural bodily actions go unnoticed and undetected.

Therefore, it is the intention of this phenomenological investigation to research the following main research question: What kind of barriers are experienced by lecturers in this virtual world of online teaching and learning with regard to online communication strategies? More specifically, the study aims to determine (i) Which online communication strategies academics mainly use in the online teaching and learning environment? And (ii) To what extent are such strategies effective in teaching and learning? To this purpose, the study sought to identify the barriers encountered by lecturers regarding online communication strategies. The findings of this study can help expand our understanding of the challenges academics might encounter regarding effective online communication strategies. Communication in an online environment requires careful planning in comparison to communication in a traditional environment. Fostering a sense of community in online learning makes the student's learning experience

more meaningful. It was established that lecturers generally communicate with students online for the mere sake of imparting knowledge (Fredericks & Alexander, 2021).

As online lecturers are not bound to a specific time, they use quick communications, such as instant message systems, to check in with students to ensure that they are able to access study materials and complete their required programme of study within the scheduled time frame. Such communication serves to uphold the connection between online instructors (including e-tutors) and students, as they indicate to students that someone is there to help and cares about their course experience.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY AND HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK**

Modern science has no consensus regarding the extent of the interrelation between the general theory of communication and various disciplinary approaches. Fry (2019) stipulates that the pinnacle of cybernetics is the awareness thereof that ensures its control over society. "Communication procedures can operate under the circumstance cybernetic control by institutional structures." Consequently, the systemic approach describes communication as a form of governance applicable to a particular organisation and society in general (Bakar, Shah & Qingyu, 2020).

Along with its merits, it becomes crucial to determine the demerits of systems theory, particularly regarding its phenomenological approach to communication. Thus, when doing so, an individual is viewed as an element of the general organic whole, wherein a person is only a variable on an equal footing with others. To explore the experiences of lecturers in teaching and learning, in view

of this new normal (online teaching and learning), the study utilised a Descriptive Phenomenological Research Design (Misra & Mazelfi, 2021).

The Community of Inquiry and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenological framework exploration aspires to develop meaning from understanding a phenomenon through the experiences and reflections of not only the research participants, but of the researchers as well (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While this study bound and contextualised lecturers' experiences within a given course, phenomenological inquiry provided the necessary means to better understand the conscious experience of academics within this given context.

The central concept of this approach is the concept of "lifeworld", which is defined by Fry (2019) as a set of subjective and direct ideas that people have about themselves and the world around them, and about the norms and values which are always initially set in everyday life

experiences that define the person's interpretation of reality. These ideas precede the scientific experience of researchers, and do not depend on scientific findings.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Khateeb, Shdaifat, Kassab and Shdaifa (2020) argue that methodology is not only the methods the researcher employs to conduct research, but entails the research design, its foundations, assumptions, limitations and characteristic procedures, and outcomes. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) take a step further by viewing methodology as the logic and theoretical paradigm embedded within a research study, while methods are the specific techniques utilised for investigation and assessment. Husserl (2019) echoes this description and emphasises the need for researchers to be keen to deliberate on how epistemologies, conceptual models, assessment instruments, and research design are conceptualised in a research study

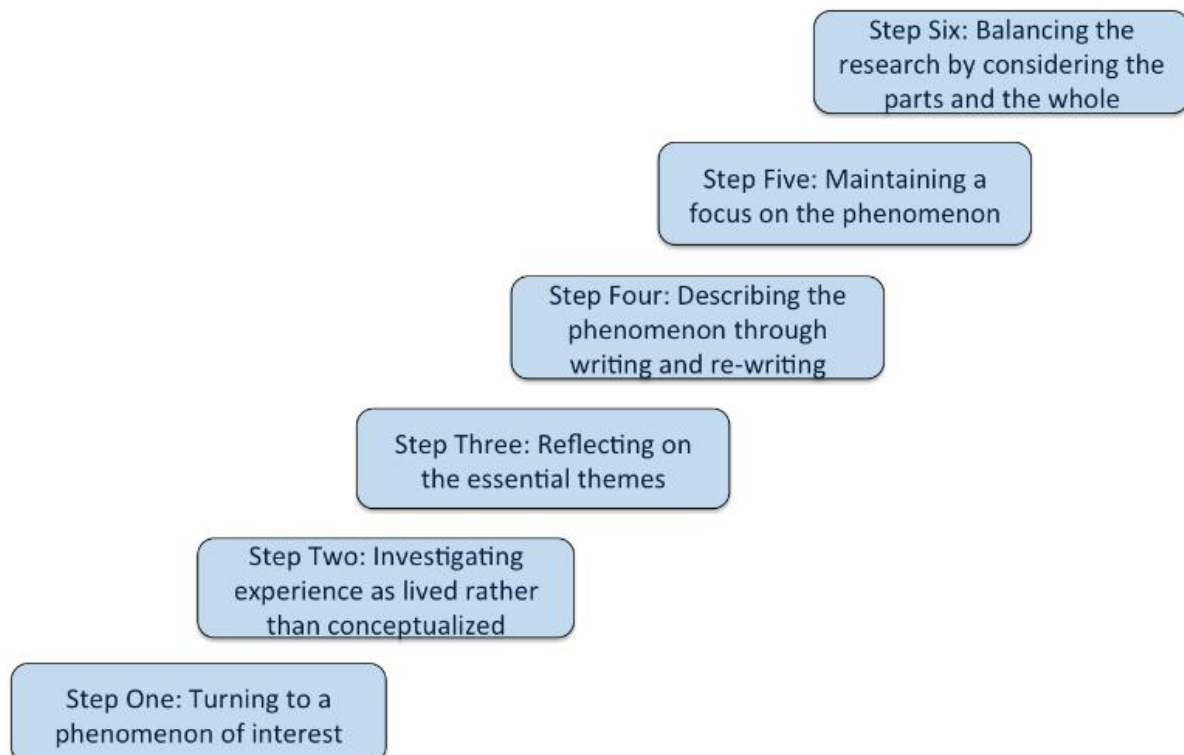


Figure 1: Steps in the phenomenological inquiry

This study adopted a phenomenological approach to accurately capture the experiences of university lecturers in the South African context regarding their online communication strategies. Figure 1 below provides a brief step-by-step overview of what a phenomenological investigation entails.

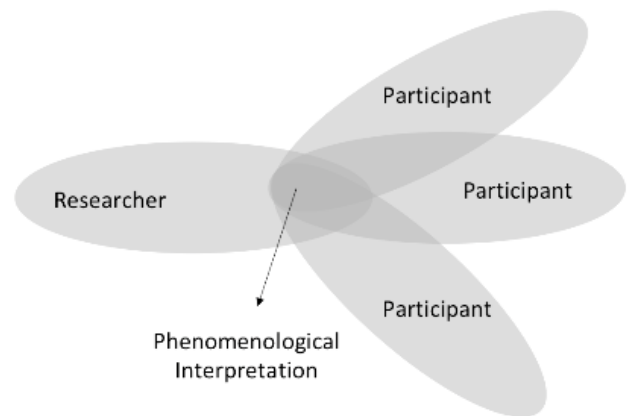
According to Faturoti (2022), as can be seen in figure 1, a phenomenological methodology involves data collection techniques that require the researcher to turn the phenomena under investigation into a lived reality and not into a conceptualisation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, this approach requires constant interaction with the data to allow for movement between the six steps. This data construction and analysis process is particularly appropriate and relevant for this study in view of its ability to move up and down along the stairway of phenomenological inquiry as new data is gathered and numerous themes emerge and coalesce.

This research was conducted at a single Open Distance e-Learning institution based in Gauteng Province, which was sampled purposefully. The objective of this design is to arrive at a description of a certain phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, the knowledge presented in this study is not universally true, but is an understanding based on what the researchers have been able to glean through discussions and interpretation. Six participants (labelled as A to F) took part in this study, consisting of three females and three males, which enabled the researcher to have rich data for analysis. The participants were sampled purposively because the study is specific to a certain phenomenon, and the selection criteria are lecturers who teach undergraduate students who learn via an online approach.

Data were collected via standardised open-ended interviews, ensuring that all participants answered the same questions, thus minimising possible

bias. There were six interview questions: three for the female and three for the male lecturers. The questions were designed to investigate participants' more profound online communication experiences.

Interpretive phenomenology presumes that individuals make selections, but are restricted by the specific circumstances of their daily life, which is recognised as situated autonomy. According to Husserl (2019), this contextual understanding of experience implies that the description of phenomena without interpretation is incredible. Therefore, lived phenomena are the foci of the research, and the reality and meaning of this phenomenon are embedded within the deliberate experience of an individual as well as the researchers.



**Figure 2: Phenomenological interpretation**

The position of the researchers in figure 2 is to enable the utilisation of their expert wisdom to guide the inquiry and make it expressive. Rather than amassing individual essences from each lived experience as in descriptive phenomenology, the commonalities and variations in the individual subjective experiences add to the description of the connotations that participants create and how those meanings affect their range. Moran (2019) maintains that interpretive phenomenology addresses the unique experience of each participant within their experience of similar phenomena.

The interview protocol focused on the participants' reflections on their conscious experience of online communication challenges. In this case, the purpose of the phenomenological inquiry was not just to identify the kind of barriers experienced by lecturers, but to come to a better understanding of how six participants from two faculties communicate in an online environment.

The data collection process involved the Faculties of Humanities and Education and spanned two weeks, during which six interviews were conducted. In a sample of six participants, the two faculties were represented by three lecturers: one senior lecturer, one associate professor and one full professor.

Personal and direct connection with each participant ensured the responses were kept anonymous. Additionally, conducting interviews away from a university environment eliminated possible bias induced by the influence of an authority figure over participants who voluntarily discussed their experiences.

All structured interviews were scheduled and conducted privately, and the researchers clarified the study's purpose and assured confidentiality. Due to social distancing requirements and the university's limited time frame for data collection, interviews were conducted according to the participant's request, and this resulted in six interviews being performed telephonically. Two via Teams, two through WhatsApp calls and two through WhatsApp video calls. During the interviews, the following questions were posed in addition to the main interview questions to seek clarification and elicit further detail:

- What exactly do you mean?
- Can you elaborate further?
- Can you substantiate?
- Please clarify.

- Motivate by providing suitable examples.

No participant left the study for personal reasons. The telephone interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the deliberations from the participants, and were audio-recorded where possible. In some instances, notes were taken because the participant did not consent to being audio-recorded. It was imperative that data were kept confidential. The interviews were subsequently transcribed, and participants verified their accuracy.

Experts from the departments of Media and Communication, and Curriculum and Instruction were requested to validate the in-depth interview guide. After the validation process, the researchers modified the guide and implemented the necessary changes as recommended by the validators.

Within this research study, the data collection instruments included a metacognitive survey tool, the lecturer and student reflections, and in-depth interviews with the participants. Each instrument provided a window into the participants' perceptions of how specific activities and online communications affected their metacognition and overall teaching and learning experiences (Bakar, Shah & Qingyu, 2020). However, the in-depth, phenomenological interviews provided the opportunity to engage telephonically and personally with all participants and allowed them to elaborate and reflect upon their challenges with online communication in teaching and learning within the institution. The embeddedness of this phenomenological method in this study allowed for a more holistic and contextual view (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) of how participants wrestle with and resolve metacognition in their respective departments. The analysis of the interviews added a rich dimension of participant experiences to the study. It

established the complexity of student learning within the setup of an institution of higher learning.

Husserl's (2019) strategy was used to explicate the data. Husserl's (2019) seven procedural stages from the Duquesne school, which obey the Husserlian tradition, is a robust method used by the researchers to discover, comprehend, and explain the lived experiences of study participants. The following stages were adhered to:

- Reading and interpreting transcripts,
- Extracting fundamental statements,
- Articulating meanings,
- Classifying into clusters of themes and validating with the original text,
- Describing,
- Returning to participants, and
- Incorporating any modifications grounded on the participants' feedback.

#### 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in this study represent a co-construction of the researcher's interpretations of the lived experiences of the participants. Various themes surfaced from the study. The intention of the study was not to determine one universal meaning of the phenomenon, but rather to give attention to the unique experiences of lecturers. Various online communication strategies were identified. Table 1 provides a summary of the different strategies employed as web-based online tools and various technological tools by the lectures.

##### 4.1 Online gadgets

The use of gadgets such as computers, laptops, cellphones, and tablets, together with online video conferencing platforms, enable lecturers to have new practices, experiences, and opportunities for teaching and learning. Although online

learning has been around for many years, most educational institutions have yet to integrate this mode of learning into their curricula (Werang & Radja, 2022).

**Table 1: Online communication strategies**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Online gadgets for emails, WhatsApp, Facebook and SMS</li><li>• Computers</li><li>• Laptops</li><li>• Smartphones</li><li>• Tablets</li><li>• Tutorial letters</li></ul>
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Additionally, using this method, especially in conjunction with face-to-face teaching, means that the workload of teaching staff tremendously increases as they need to create content for their online platforms while also learning to use online learning tools.

Participant E indicated that over 360 emails are sent and received daily. The average lecturer receives 180 of those emails each day, of which only 26% will contain useful and relevant information. When lecturers are bombarded with all this superfluous information, they simply bulk delete or skim through. However, there is a likelihood of missing out on important information that might be buried among all the other emails.

The average lecturer spends 12 hours a week checking, reading, deleting, and responding to emails — effectively utilising 28 per cent of the work week. With less than half of such emails deserving attention and many going unread, this is a big chunk of wasted time. Moreover, the sender always expects a response from the receiver. Simply getting back to work after answering an email takes an average of 120 seconds. This decreases productivity when lecturers check their emails 30 times per hour. A customer-facing employee cannot check emails at that rate, as it would impact productivity and customer satisfaction.

Participant C reported that students are more adept than lecturers when handling newer devices such as laptops and smartphones. This may be because of the agility of students when it comes to the latest technology or their exposure to technology from a very young age. On the other hand, lecturers are older than students by a generation, and may have had less exposure to technology while growing up (Vale & Graven, 2022).

Participant A reported that students tease lecturers by labelling them as the “Generation Born Before Technology (GBBT)”. It simply means that most older lecturers are less adept at handling the gadgets needed to teach online classes. Nowadays students are products of the “Instant Gratification” Generation because they want things instantly.

The use of gadgets in teaching and learning supports the study of Tagoe and Abakah (2018), where it was revealed that virtual learning makes standardised education accessible to students all around the globe. This is a stunning reward for online education providers. Participant B argued that students in remote areas and those who cannot afford the higher fees associated with traditional campus study programmes where sourcing funds and student debt often eclipsed the joy of learning.

However, e-learning and communication require the necessary computer equipment and a constant internet connection to run and enrol on online learning platforms. This can pose insurmountable challenges for some students and universities with outdated hardware and software (Thoiuraya & Radwan, 2022). It is also integral that in conducting online classes, the experiences, sentiments, and perceptions of students be identified so that necessary improvements can be made (Rodriguez et al, 2018).

## 4.2 Emails

Emails are the most vital instrument for communication, especially at Open and Distance e-Learning institutions. However, while they are valuable, there are several downsides, and several lecturers have expressed their discontentment with using emails for virtual teaching and learning (Faturoti, 2022).

While it is common to be consistently connected, some participants argued that not all students have constant access to cyberspace. There are numerous sources of free Wi-Fi in South Africa, such as municipal libraries and hotspots, shopping malls, and fast-food restaurants such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald’s, and many others. There are several places within urban areas where students who do not have access to the internet can access it free of charge; however, the lack of access is more pronounced for students who reside in rural areas where these public hotspots are few and far between, and mobile network is sporadic at best (Tagoe & Abakah, 2019).

It is not a secret that emails are not designed to be collaboration tools, yet many lecturers use them in that fashion. From managing projects to troubleshooting problems, never-ending email threads become inefficient, confusing, and troublesome for productivity. With many collaboration and project management products now available, emails can no longer be viewed as the tool lecturers turn to in order to keep abreast of tasks and projects.

Although emails are user-friendly, and the lecturers may send a message and have it instantly delivered to the mailbox of the intended recipients, who are fellow lecturers, there is a high likelihood of recipients ignoring the email. There is no guarantee that recipients will read and respond to emails promptly. Some lecturers ignore any alerts that may appear, which

signal that there is an email in their inbox. In the same vein, if the lecturer sends a time-sensitive email, there is no assurance that another lecturer will react timeously.

Most of the preceding factors mentioned can be combined into one major negative point: a lack of active participation from fellow lecturers. Some lecturers adapted to electronic communication well, while others did not, and those who did not adapt will generally resort to passive participation. Since there is no oversight because email accounts are private, there is no serious consequence to encourage lecturers to become active participants or to ensure that they do.

Issues experienced by online lecturers comprised of having to find ways of being effective in delivering the course, responding to a series of student emails, and becoming acclimatised to the online instruments and infrastructure. Critics of online teaching and learning question the value and effectiveness of online communication. Since online teaching and learning systems cannot convey real-time interactions between the lecturer and students, their educational effectiveness is lower than that of a traditional face-to-face lecture. Without understanding that it requires a significant amount of the lecturer's time, not responding to the head of departments' email messages in a timely manner can be seen as defiance (Brown, 2021).

One of the main arguments against the use of social media and electronic communication in a virtual environment is that they promote a disconnect from normal social activities. For example, lecturers would rather sit staring at their mobile phones or texting each other than make a phone call or start a conversation with a friend.

Cyberbullying is a major challenge with any form of online communication. There will always be bullies in any type of virtual classroom and electronic setting.

Where there is no oversight and no real supervision, it is easy for bullies to prey on their colleagues. This can also be one of the most detrimental issues when trying to use electronic communication in the classroom. Even in virtual classroom settings, bullying can discourage students from participating (Fredericks & Alexander, 2021).

Emails at the classroom level and other forms of electronic communication and social media have their uses. Each lecturer needs to weigh the pros and cons based on the curriculum and lessons, and then decide whether using emails is beneficial or detrimental to the students and their learning experience. As technology advances, there is every chance that the use of emails and electronic communication will become commonplace, depending on the age of the students (Fry, 2019).

Many online courses do not have synchronous live instruction from a lecturer, so the experience is no different than students self-teaching by reading text from a screen (Dziuban et al, 2018). In this format, after reading the assigned screen text, students churn out short answers, essays, discussion comments and reviews, and do quizzes to prove that they were engaged in the course. There are no oral responses because there is no synchronous interaction. If students have questions, a teacher's email response often comes far too late—and by that time, students have often figured out the answer or no longer care about it (Dziuban et al, 2018).

### 4.3 Tutorial letters

An online tutorial letter designed by a lecturer is a strategy used to communicate with students about the expected approach to teaching, learning, and assessment. The tutorial letter contains important information about the module a student is registered for. It guides the student on how to go about the module and navigate any difficulties. Moreover, it gives an overview



of teaching practice, especially for those who desire to become teachers, and it contains information about assignments and examinations. It also includes certain general and administrative information about the module (Thouraya & Radwan, 2020).

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is a well-known pioneer in Open Distance and e-Learning, and most institutions of higher learning emulate its best approach in this regard. Typically, students have access to tutorial letters immediately after registration. At Unisa, all tutorial letters are electronically available on the university's online platform, and students can view the tutorial letters for the modules for which they are registered. Online tutorials are provided with the latest technologies. Tutorial letters are well structured and user-friendly for students and lecturers, and they are provided in recent technologies. However, the six participants complained that tutorial letters do not provide detailed information about their registered modules.

Materials referred to in the tutorial letter may be downloaded. This suggests that course materials are downloadable. If given time and a little organisation from the student, an entire course can be downloaded, and the materials studied offline. Learning platforms may also employ a nifty video feature called "Dynamic Stream Switching", which allows for varying strengths of connection and bandwidth in real-time. This means that the content always streams steadily, no matter what speed of internet connection is available (Lim, Covrig, Freed, De Oliveira, Ongo & Newman, 2019).

#### 4.4 Announcement platform

The online announcement platform is a learning management system that

assists primary lecturers in communicating with their subordinates and the entire university's administrative departments through the internet. It is advisable that lecturers access the institution's online platform on a daily basis because additional material and important notices are uploaded there (Misra & Mazelfi, 2021).

Lecturers use the announcements tool to inform colleagues about special meetings, local conferences or important course-related issues. When lecturers post an announcement, subordinates may receive an email reminding them to check their module website. The website for each registered module is specifically dedicated to supporting novice lecturers' learning for the module. When committed lecturers make a habit of visiting a module site regularly, they get accustomed to various features of online learning, such as:

- Acquainting themselves with the module details. What does the module entail? Is it a semester or year module?
- Visiting official study material portals to get important files such as old and new tutorial letters, study guides and question papers. For fully online modules, lecturers are advised to go to the learning units for study materials. Relevant documents provided by the respective lecturers are available in the Additional Resources tool.
- Checking the schedule to view formal assignments, their closing dates, and final examination dates.
- Engaging in the discussion tool will allow lecturers to exchange fruitful ideas with their students about the course. Lecturers may include other important topics and forums for the qualification (Faturoti, 2022).

Lecturers can organise virtual chat platforms for students to interact with their peers online during and after class hours. Giving group assignments and group discussions and allowing students to interact online to discuss the assignments is a step towards eliminating boredom (Alawamleh, Al-Twait, & Al-Saht, 2020). Virtual interactions are different from face-to-face interactions; thus, using these tools is a step towards closing this gap. It is an unfortunate experience that lecturers interviewed complained about novice lecturers who do not bother to check the Announcement platform.

MyMoodle is the institution's (Unisa's) formal collaborative teaching and learning environment. It primarily supports online courses and other institutional-related groups and communities. The institution's virtual platform is built on Moodle open-source software. myMoodle provides lecturers with access to all their current modules and project sites if students are linked to these (Bakar, Shah & Qingyu, 2020). In addition, as online learning leans more towards continuous assessment, students are likely to experience fewer online assignments and possibly no formal examinations (Dziuban et al, 2018).

Lecturers groused about students who do not keep to due dates for assignments. Their tasks are submitted late, and students who are not diligent constantly give flimsy excuses suspiciously occurring on assessment due dates such as ill-health supported by a medical practitioner's certificate, death in the extended family and domestic violence, amongst others. Below are actual excuses from slothful students requesting extensions from the primary lecturers of their modules:

*Some students do not manage to submit the assignments before the closing date because of ill health. They lie about amputations due to diabetes.*

*'I was hospitalised for three weeks, and I am in possession of the doctor's certificate.'*

*Death of spouse due to COVID-19. 'I have a death certificate to back up the request.'*

*Domestic violence for parents who keep on quarrelling time and again. 'Mother ending up in the hospital and the father in custody. Divorce in the family is another excuse.'*

*'Stages 5 and 6 of load shedding in my area.'*

Since some medical practitioners give false medical reports, lecturers are left without any choice except to grant extensions, even when the excuse is flimsy. As with any online class, it is vital that online lecturers provide timely and detailed feedback to students on their submitted work so students can see where they have mastered study material and where they still have gaps in their knowledge (Khateeb et al, 2020).

### 4.5 Consultation hours

Consultation means a time set aside for students to seek contact (most commonly) face-to-face with academic staff such as lecturers in order to raise any issues they may have in the unit they are studying. In addition, this time is to be used to consult on issues related specifically to the course the lecturer is teaching.

Students are urged to make it a point to communicate with their lecturers telephonically and use the lecturer's contact numbers. The working hours for consulting and contacting lecturers are indicated, and, in most cases, it is 08h00 to 16h00 from

Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and weekends. Any available lecturer will answer the student's call and assist as promptly as possible. The following are experiences from lecturers:

*'Most students call during awkward hours. Imagine getting a call at 1 AM. When you ask why the student calls during such time, the response is selfish and negative. They even say calls are cheaper when one calls late at night or [in the] early hours of the morning.'*

*'I got a call on New Year's Eve. The student was asking for a scope of the supplementary examination paper that she was going to write. This is frustrating.'*

Lecturers indicated that their telephones are inundated with calls, and sometimes it looks like a switchboard where they would be answering calls for almost the whole day. Consequently, their research activities suffer. Moreover, some indicated that students do not respect office hours. Other lecturers cited the fact that students call them on weekends when attending church or funeral services of their loved ones. This has had negative repercussions because some lecturers ended up with broken families and are either separated or divorced.

#### 4.6 SMS and WhatsApp

Although WhatsApp appears to be a good tool to use for online classes, it has its drawbacks, and students should familiarise themselves with the tool before jumping into the deep end. WhatsApp is a strange but intriguing concept. It is worth noting that WhatsApp was launched in 2009. As long as there is a Wi-Fi connection, it can

be viewed as a free multi-platform messaging app that enables users to share their status, send and receive text and voice note messages and make and receive voice and video calls at any time of their choice (Dziuban et al, 2018).

This app is appealing because it works across various mobile phones and computer operating systems, so a user can continue with the conversation anytime and anywhere. It can also take advantage of Wi-Fi and cellular data to make one-on-one or group calls, thereby reducing the need for expensive call charges (Fredericks & Alexander, 2021).

Important short message services (SMSs) and notices are sent to students from time to time. Lecturers with big classes of 8 000+ students lamented about students who keep sending them 'call back' requests. Sometimes they send an SMS and expect speedy responses from the lecturer. Just as with computers, there are health risks associated with spending too much time in front of mobile phone screens. The convenient small screen on mobile phones can be viewed as a demerit, as reading documents on a small screen can lead to eye strain. It is vital to ensure an appropriate balance between screen use and interpersonal communication.

Some lecturers indicated that the minute students notice that a lecturer is online, they start sending WhatsApp voice notes. Sometimes they send thought-provoking messages irrespective of the stipulated time for student-lecturer interactions. Additionally, students make WhatsApp videos and voice calls at awkward hours.

In short, it can therefore be extrapolated from this theme that despite the unbelievable value of mobile phones in learning activities, they tend to negatively

affect the lecturers at Open Distance and e-Learning institutions. This theme backs the study of Khateeb (2020), where it was disclosed that the use of mobile phones is one of the leading causes of adverse effects on students across all levels because of their addictive nature, which shifts students' focus from their studies.

**Table 3: Challenges for lecturers**

• Telephone calls and WhatsApp hours
• Call backs
• Ignorance of messages
• Passive participation
• Requests for deadline extensions
• Technological incompetence

In this study, the researchers attempted to convey particularised and collective experiences by adopting interpretive phenomenology. This methodology is regarded as compatible with a broad range of teaching and learning activities. To construct an understanding of the usage of phenomenology and the phenomenological methods used in the study, the researchers curdled the analytical lens on phenomenology to holistically explore the challenges and welfare of its adoption in the study. Despite the different contexts and participants, phenomenology provided a means for driving the study (Moran, 2019). Phenomenology is thus utilised primarily as a methodological approach to illuminate lived experiences, particularly in the professions, including education. It has also occasionally provided possibilities for articulating teaching and learning theories in close relation to concrete practice (Husserl, 2019).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to explore and highlight an interpretation of the lived experiences of a phenomenon. The findings of this study portray the summation of the researchers' interpretations and the lived experiences of the lecturers, and therefore

invite further exploration of the meaning of the phenomenon of threshold notions in online communication. This study was based predominantly on interviews, and it was imperative that the six participants articulated their lived experiences in their interviews. To this end, the scope of the study included significant themes that influenced the lived experiences of the concomitant issues related to the participants. Therefore, the findings and conclusions are highly swayed by the study population and the time frame allocated for data collection. While exertions were taken to maximise credibility and dependability, it was inevitable that this study's findings were persuaded by the fact that the participants agreed to be interviewees, as the participants in this study were interested in and comfortable with sharing their experiences.

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