



To Embrace or Not to Embrace? New Academics (NAs) or New University Teachers (NUTs)' Challenges and Preferences Between Face-To-Face and Online Teaching.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused institutions of higher education to urgently seek appropriate methods of involving students in matters of learning and teaching. Whether by conscious decision or circumstantial necessity, the imperative to embrace and implement online instruction has proven to be a formidable challenge for some academics, Particularly those who are new to academia and are referred to as New Academics (NAs) or Newly Appointed University Educators (NUTs). Framed within the context of Glasser (1998)'s Choice Theory (CT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT), and employing a qualitative research methodology, this paper draws upon data obtained from questionnaires focused on needs analysis (NAQs) that were distributed during the induction of new academics from 2020 to 2022. The primary aim was to comprehend the challenges and preferences faced by new academics (NAs) or new university teachers (NUTs) pertaining to student instruction. NAQs were sent to NAs/NUTs prior to the induction to understand the kind of support they need, and the NAQ responses were thematically analysed. The study's findings reveal that NAs and NUTs faced challenges in online teaching due to inadequate resources and reduced student participation. Despite the pandemic's push for online teaching, these NUTs still favored in-person interaction. The article's conclusions suggest that there should be adjustments in how new academics or teachers are introduced to their roles, along with enhanced support to help them develop skills for engaging and instructing students effectively in various online settings.

Keywords: New Academics, Online Teaching and Learning, COVID-19 Pandemic, University Teachers, Needs Analysis Questionnaire, Face-to-Face Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Although significant attention has been directed toward documenting the COVID-19 outbreak and its global impact on people's lives (Ayithey et al., 2020), scant research exists regarding the online teaching and learning encounters encountered by new academics (NAs) who joined higher education institutions amid the pandemic. The Higher Education Sector was not exempt from these adverse effects. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions of higher learning were compelled to enact temporary closures as a precautionary measure (Orfan et al., 2021). Throughout this period, online learning gained unprecedented traction in

comparison to traditional face-to-face instruction. Despite the substantial surge in demand for online teaching and learning, academics encountered a spectrum of challenges and prospects (Kong et al., 2020).

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic caught educational institutions off guard, leaving no room for advance preparations for remote instruction. Within the context of higher education, academics were thrust into an emergency response scenario, ensuring the continuity of academic operations through remote learning and teaching. Swiftly, academics embraced online teaching methodologies, encompassing the utilization of video

recordings, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, and various other online platforms (Hashemi, 2021). Although certain higher education establishments had already integrated online learning modalities, the disruptions wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic compelled these online programmes to encompass the entire off-campus population, often without due consideration of users' perceptions or their readiness to engage with virtual learning tools (Mushtaha et al., 2022). Furthermore, the transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to online-based instruction presented an array of inherent opportunities and challenges.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the face of unprecedented and unpredictable times, brought about by events like the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as community and student protests, there arises a necessity to discover means by which learning and teaching can remain undisturbed. Whether by choice or by circumstance, the requirement to embrace and adopt online teaching has never been a straightforward task, especially for certain academic staff or university teachers, particularly those who are new to academia (NAs) or new university teachers (NUTs) within higher education institutions (HEIs). One of the challenges that these teachers encountered when it comes to online teaching is their proficiency in computer technology. This is just one of the numerous obstacles that academics face (Mbongo, Hako, and Munangatire, 2021). Additionally, challenges may arise in formulating and implementing various inclusive approaches that are essential for online instruction. Difficulties might also manifest in effectively engaging students in the process of learning and teaching.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given this context, this paper poses the following questions:

What are the experiences of new academics in relation to online teaching?
What challenges are they encountering

regarding online teaching? If they were to choose between face-to-face and online teaching, which learning and teaching approach would they prefer? And why?

As Academic Development (AD) practitioners are tasked with offering support and professional growth to academics both new and experienced within the system, these inquiries were directed towards identifying ways through which we can promote and instill new methods, a culture of teaching and learning, and the adoption of alternative approaches in line with the demands of specific periods, such as the Covid-19 pandemic in higher education. Additionally, understanding the challenges faced by new academics would offer insights into how we can best assist those entering higher education institutions to leverage the opportunities presented by online teaching and learning.

REVIEWED LITERATURE

Understanding online learning and teaching

The concept of online learning is not novel, having various definitions and interpretations. However, this study bases its comprehension of online learning on Regmi and Jones (2020), who define online teaching and learning as an educational approach that facilitates learning through the utilisation of information technology and communication. This approach provides learners with access to all the necessary educational programs. In a simpler and more contextual manner, online learning and teaching can be understood as a method for sharing knowledge using technology.

The idea of online teaching and learning gained prominence during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic when diverse online platforms were employed while higher learning institutions were temporarily closed. Amity University (2021) distinguishes between online learning and distance learning. They posit that distance learning is traditionally known as correspondence courses, where study materials and learning

resources are dispatched to students through mail or email. In this learning format, there is minimal interaction between students and teachers.

Online learning represents a more contemporary approach, employing Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) such as Moodle and Blackboard to distribute multimedia lectures, facilitate discussions, share student resources, and conduct exams (Amity Online, 2021). This method of learning fosters interactivity, with teachers and students frequently convening online through digital platforms. Similarly, Heng and Kol (2021) indicate that online learning (often used interchangeably with e-learning) is a form of distance education that leverages technology as the mediator of the learning process, with teaching being entirely delivered through the internet. In contrast, distance learning can be understood as an endeavor to provide access to education for those who are geographically remote.

Hence, the integration of e-learning within most higher education institutions was devised to mitigate the challenges that arose due to the abrupt closure of these institutions. Consequently, faculty members and students had to rely entirely on the use of advanced technological tools and platforms to ensure continuous teaching and learning (Mushtaha et al., 2022).

Opportunities and challenges of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic

The pandemic wreaked havoc across the country, leading to the cancellation of face-to-face classes and their transition to online platforms. This shift brought about the emergence of online learning, enabling students to continue their education (Heng and Sol, 2021). The sudden switch from in-person to online learning posed numerous challenges for students, teachers, administrators, and education leaders. Given that many students and teachers lacked training in utilising technology as the primary medium for learning, Kavarić et al. (2021) indicate that numerous teachers encountered

difficulties in adapting to online teaching. This can be largely attributed to the rapid spread of the pandemic, which left little opportunity for training teachers and students in the use of virtual learning resources like Moodle and Blackboard.

Furthermore, the e-learning system has complicated the role of teachers. They are now tasked with gathering, preparing, and presenting information through the internet. Consequently, this has led to a surge in workload for teachers (Adnan & Anwar, 2020, as cited in Kavarić et al., 2021). Additionally, online learning's effectiveness relies heavily on technology devices and internet connectivity. Heng and Sol (2021) assert that the biggest challenge to online learning is technological in nature. If those involved in the teaching and learning process lack digital competence due to inexperience or insufficient training, it hampers the learning experience. Challenges such as lack of familiarity with applications, unstable or slow internet connections, and incompatible browsers posed significant hurdles for both teachers and students. Supporting this, a study conducted by Jalli (2020) in Southeast Asia found that inadequate internet access hindered full participation in online learning.

However, one's geographical location plays a pivotal role in their ability to engage in online learning. Individuals residing in rural areas, where internet stability is more reliable, encounter fewer obstacles (Flynn and Himmel, 2020). Mushtaha et al. (2022) acknowledge that while online learning was the preferred alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of experience with e-learning among teachers and inadequate support resulted in many teachers devising student courses without proper consideration.

In their study conducted in India, Kavarić et al. (2021) report that the challenges of shifting education online during the pandemic extended beyond technological resources to psychological well-being. Similarly, Mushtaha et al. (2022)

highlight in their research that the sudden adoption of e-learning had negative impacts on users' mental health and socialization. Approximately 55.6% of participants acknowledged adverse effects due to the transition to e-learning. While online learning boasts several advantages, as Prisanna (2021) indicates, it also demands high self-motivation. Correspondingly, around 77.2% of participants in the study by Mushtaha et al. (2022) offered positive feedback on the flexibility of online learning. Prisanna (2021) further notes that successful online students develop diverse strategies to keep up with coursework. The availability of recorded class sessions allows students to learn at their convenience, affording them the freedom to choose their study times. Ultimately, the advantages of online learning lie in promoting familiarity with the technology employed by both students and teachers, facilitating their full participation in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Theoretical Foundations of the Paper

Our paper is grounded in Glasser (1998)'s Choice Theory (CT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT). Choice Theory (CT) concerns an individual's control over their own emotions and actions, which a person can undertake. Glasser argues that CT teaches and highlights that every behavior is selected by an individual and that such behavior is primarily motivated by the desire to fulfill five fundamental human needs. These five needs are the need for love and acceptance, the need for power or empowerment, the need for freedom, the need for enjoyment, and the need for survival. CT is based on the understanding and assertion that people's actions and engagements are often driven by these five basic needs. Furthermore, CT asserts that all human behaviors consist of four key components: acting, feeling, thinking, and physiology.

Expanding upon CT, Glasser introduces the Rational Choice Theory

(RCT), which emphasizes that people typically make decisions based on their assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the circumstances they are in. This implies that individuals make decisions by evaluating or weighing the costs and benefits of the potential options before embarking on any course of action. Additionally, human behavior is viewed as a means of fulfilling individual needs. Glasser (1998) argues that although individuals aim to make choices that they believe will be advantageous, such decisions might turn out to be incorrect, leading to unfavorable outcomes.

Context of the Paper

As Academic Development (AD) practitioners affiliated with The New Academics Transitioning into Higher Education Project (NATHEP), we were assigned the responsibility of devising an induction framework for new academics or university educators. The NATHEP project involves the participation of ten (10) South African universities and is exclusively dedicated to enhancing the capabilities and capacity of staff developers to conceptualize, organize, implement, and assess professional development initiatives for the orientation of new academics within their respective institutions. The induction model is designed to be contextually adaptable and rooted in theory.

With this rationale in mind, we formulated a Need-Based Induction (NBI) model, which we initiated in the period between 2019 and 2022. An essential aspect of our NBI model revolves around the utilization of Needs Analysis Questionnaires (NAQs), which are distributed to the (NAs)/ (NUTs) for completion prior to the commencement of the induction process (Ravhuhali & Mboweni, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative exploratory research design, with data sourced from Needs Analysis Questionnaires

(NAQs) to comprehend the challenges and preferences of new academics (NAs/NUTs) concerning student teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. The exploratory research design was well-suited for this paper's objective, as it sought to gain insights into the experiences of a situation, phenomenon, or individuals (de Vos et al., 2005).

The NAQs consisted of open-ended questions and were completed by NAs/NUTs who joined South African higher education institutions between 2019 and 2022. The use of open-ended questions was chosen to provide participants with ample opportunities to express themselves fully, offering them the chance to provide comprehensive answers and share all the pertinent information required for this study (Popping, 2015; Creswell, 2012). Employing the NAQ as a tool before academic induction is vital for AD practitioners in enhancing the preparation of induction programs and, most crucially, in finding ways to support NAs/NUTs in adopting technology-driven pedagogy (Ravhuhali & Mboweni, 2022; Ravhuhali, Mboweni, & Nendauni, 2022). The NAQ offers insights into how we can best assist new academics in their transition to higher education institutions (Ravhuhali & Mboweni, 2022).

A total of forty (40) NAQs were randomly selected from the induction sessions held between 2020 and 2022 for NAs/NUTs. Participants were queried about their familiarity with online teaching or remote teaching, along with the challenges they encountered in online teaching. Furthermore, NAs/NUTs were asked to share their perspectives on their preferences between face-to-face and online teaching, along with the rationale for their choices. Responses from NAs/NUTs within the NAQs were subjected to thematic analysis, enabling the data to be categorized according to emerging themes during the data sorting process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Anxieties and challenges regarding online teaching

The NAQs provided valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by NAs/NUTs concerning online teaching. This holds particular significance given the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on higher education institutions, necessitating a shift towards online or blended learning. University of the People (2020) highlights that online learning typically requires comprehensive planning, which Hodges et al. (2020) suggest might take up to nine months. However, the abruptness of the pandemic prevented thorough preparation and training, resulting in widespread frustration.

Although a subset of NAs/NUTs expressed optimism about online teaching, citing advantages such as increased engagement through resources like lecture recordings, many highlighted fewer positive experiences. Numerous NAs/NUTs noted difficulties associated with teaching online, especially when they were still grappling with the learning management system (LMS) adopted by their institution. Financial constraints also played a role, with some NAs/NUTs noting that the provided data subsidy was inadequate for effective remote work.

Selected comments illustrate these challenges:

Currently, I am not sure how to use it online as I haven't been trained on it and my students are not well conversant with it. NA1 (2021)

I am struggling with the Moodle learning management system (LMS) used here and don't know how it works. I also used to struggle with Blackboard I have used it previously. NA 8 (2021)

For me, I am wondering as to how the little subsidy of R150-R200 of data is going to help me with data for online teaching. NA 5 (2020)

I have never taught online and now I am confronted with the challenges of how I am going to engage my students and the R200 subsidy. NA 4 (2022)

Network issues and I am not sure about students' participation and their comprehension of the system, especially first years. NA 5 (2022)

Training on Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Effective online student assessment emerged as a substantial challenge during the pandemic, in line with the findings of Mbhiza and Muthelo (2022). Success in online teaching and learning is intricately linked to competence in using the LMS, a fact supported by Bhalalusesa et al. (2013). NAs/NUTs stressed the need for continuous training in using these platforms to ensure successful navigation. This is confirmed when one NA indicated that it is a stressful experience in the beginning. Therefore, training cannot be once-off but should be a continuous exercise until one gets the 'hang of it'. Morgan (2020) confirms this in a study that revealed that lecturers felt teaching online was stressful as they were expected to suddenly transition fully from the traditional face-to-face mode of instruction without sufficient training on LMS. Also, Mbhiza and Muthelo (2022) note that the most worrying challenges experienced were in relation to the design and administration of a variety of assessment tasks. This resulted in assessment activities being done for the sake of ensuring that the content is covered. Some responses included:

Not very well, I am learning. I am learning with Moodle platform; I have not yet applied it in real-class teaching. NA 1 (2021)

A stressful experience in the beginning, but quite effective once you get the hang of it. NA 4(2020)

The challenges are on understanding of the online platforms for both learners and

lecturers, more especially module. NA 8 (2020)

It is difficult to establish a connection with students online. Thus, poor connection = poor student engagement. NA 5 (2020)

Some students were reluctant to use Moodle to write their activities. NA 6(2020)

I find it very challenging for students, especially for students in the field of Mathematical Sciences. NA 7 (2020)

Challenges: Learners are not yet well-trained, and they bring all the technical problems to the lecturer instead of designated departments. NA 9 (2020)

In their study on "Academics' Experience of Implementing E-Learning in a South African Higher Education Institution", Maphalala and Adigun (2021, p.10) identified a variety of challenges experienced with the use of e-learning platforms in some higher education institutions. These challenges included a deficit in ICT infrastructure, unreliable Internet access, lack of technical assistance or support, and insufficient training opportunities for e-learning activities on the university's e-learning platform. Maphalala and Adigun (2021, p.10) argue that such challenges tend to hinder the confidence and morale of academics. Additionally, these challenges dampen academics' enthusiasm to create interactive content or module/course materials suitable for virtual learning (Maphalala and Adigun, 2021, p.10). These responses underscore the ongoing necessity for training on the LMS platform that the university employs, benefiting both academics and students. It is noteworthy that universities have been urging academics to utilize the established LMS, a call that often encounters resistance. Muthuprasad et al. (2021) advocate for augmenting technological skills as a boon for online learning. Consequently, the challenges of online learning are often seen as secondary to face-to-face learning. This dynamic contributes to academics' preference for the

face-to-face teaching mode, seeking to avoid burdening students with technologies they may lack access to.

Poor network connection and lack of gadgets for students

The challenge of inadequate network connectivity and lack of suitable devices for students loomed large for many NAs/NUTs. These limitations highlighted the digital divide and socioeconomic disparities among students. Some of NAs/NUTs had this to say:

Students struggle with network reception. Not all students can afford suitable gadgets. Others are unable to concentrate during class because of lot of noise coming from their background. NA 10 (2020)

Unstable network connectivity and lack of support in terms of specific needs of Lecturers. NA 11 (2020)

Technical glitches, poor connection during class or while students are writing atest. NA 2 (2022)

Internet connectivity plays a pivotal role in determining the success of students within an online learning environment. When a student encounters issues like poor network coverage, dropped internet connections, or the inability to access and download learning materials, it can ultimately result in their academic shortcomings. Notably, a significant portion of students hail from rural and underprivileged communities where internet access is hindered due to infrastructural inadequacies. Netanda (2020) highlights that remote rural students grapple with challenges in accessing the learning management systems (LMS) utilised for teaching and learning. Those in closer proximity to urban hubs have better LMS accessibility than their rural counterparts. This underscores the need for both students and educators to be equipped with technologies that ensure unfettered access to online teaching and learning, irrespective of their geographical locations.

The observations concerning the lack of devices underscore the socio-economic background prevailing among most students within the institution. Van Staden and Naidoo (2022, p.269) also underscore the adverse impact of limited access to digital devices and unreliable internet connectivity on students from impoverished communities. These challenges impede their ability to effectively engage in online learning and access support services offered by the campus. This is primarily due to students from poor backgrounds having limited or no access to devices that would facilitate their learning process. Consequently, a significant portion of students rely heavily on their mobile phones for online learning, which can present challenges when completing assignments and assessments. Dube (2020) further underscores that some students in rural communities lack even a basic smartphone and must rely on borrowing from those who possess one to pursue their education. Moreover, in addition to resource constraints, Van Staden and Naidoo (2022) point out that the poor network coverage prevalent in many remote rural communities where students hail from has an adverse impact. It jeopardizes their ability to effectively participate in online learning activities and, consequently, excludes them from reaping the benefits of such endeavors. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, certain students experienced anxiety and a sense of isolation from academic activities (Van Staden & Naidoo, 2022).

Students' poor attendance and participation

Another challenge highlighted by NAs/NUTs is the students' poor attendance and participation. The responses below suggest that many academics or university teachers, AD practitioners included, are conditioned to believe that the traditional way of teaching works best. Further, this might be attributed to the fact that NAs/NUTs are not well conversant with pedagogical approaches that one can use to teach effectively online leading to frustrations when it comes to online teaching. The responses above suggest

that many academics or university teachers, AD practitioners included, are conditioned to believe that the traditional way of teaching works best. Further, this might be attributed to the fact that NAs/NUTs are not well conversant with pedagogical approaches that one can use to teach effectively online, leading to frustrations when it comes to online teaching. Some had stated the following:

Poor attendance and it is hard to do tutorials online. NA 12 (2020)

No full student participation and difficulty in gauging student satisfaction and understanding in real-time. NA 1 (2022)

Not accessible to all students. Conducting online assessment. NA 3 (2022)

The challenge is students not attending, talking about the data and the load shading. Also, the R200 that the university is giving is too little for lecturers to work remotely. NA 4 (2022)

The challenges with online teaching are that it limits student participation and when there is load shedding it affects smooth teaching due to the network. NA 5 (2022)

It is important to observe that a variety of institutions host a diverse student body, many of whom originate from underprivileged backgrounds with limited access to digital technology. These students encounter digital technology primarily at the university level, such as when submitting typed assignments. As a result, their proficiency in digital skills remains restricted, potentially hindering their capacity to effectively engage in online learning interactions.

Williamson et al. (2020) highlight that not all young individuals possess the level of digital proficiency often assumed. Consequently, even with the provision of training on online platforms, it may take an extended period for students to become adept with the technologies. In their autoethnographic study, Mbhiza and Muthelo

(2022) discovered that only a minority of students actively participated in online teaching and learning sessions, with few contributing to discussions or engaging with the content.

Mbhiza and Muthelo (2022) suggest that one reason for the lack of engagement and questioning among students is the lecturers' limited control over their activities during online teaching and learning sessions. These researchers further hypothesise that students might log into online sessions but refrain from active involvement in the broader teaching and learning process. As Krull and De Klerk (2021) also point out, the unfortunate reality persists that despite owning smartphones, numerous students enrolled in South African higher education institutions struggle to effectively utilize such devices for educational purposes.

Face-to-face as a preferred teaching and learning modus operandi for engaging with students.

When asked about their preferred method of teaching, NAs/NUTs overwhelmingly said that they prefer face-to-face teaching because it provides them with more interactive sessions with students. Their responses suggest that they are not ready to embrace the new normal of doing things online and would rather teach their students face-to-face as they used to do in the past. Some NAs/NUTs' responses are captured as follows:

I prefer face-to-face. NA 10 (2020)

I prefer contact classes because it makes room to give more examples to students and monitor their concentration. NA 12 (2020)

Face-to-Face. You can get full student's participation and gauge their understanding and satisfaction in real-time. NA 1 (2022)

I would prefer to use both mainly because some lockdown regulation doesn't allow gatherings. NA 5 (2022)

Face-to-face because I get to engage and interact with the students on a personal level and get to assess whether they are understanding what they are being taught by their body language. NA 2 (2022)

Face-to-face because it allows vigorous interaction between the lecturer and students. NA 3 (2022)

I would choose face-to-face because it is more convenient in a way that you get more interactive with students and be able to consultation times. NA 4 (2022)

Naik (2016) contends that the adoption of online learning facilitates the democratization of access, diminishing the significance of cost and geography as barriers to the engagement of the world's most disadvantaged with the brightest minds globally (p.2). The responses from NAs/NUTs reveal a preference for face-to-face interaction with their students, as opposed to online teaching and learning. These responses resonate with the sentiment expressed by Barrett (2010), who indicates that many teachers derive satisfaction from instructing within a live, physical classroom and require proper training to transition effectively to online learning.

Another notable stressor for NAs/NUTs in terms of online teaching is the challenges posed by network connectivity, power disruptions (load-shedding), and students' accessibility. A study conducted in the United Kingdom by Watermeyer, Crick, Knight, and Goodall (2020) reports that academics felt unprepared, inadequately supported, and significantly apprehensive about online teaching, learning, and assessment. Half of the academics who participated in the study by Watermeyer et al. (2020) expressed reservations about students' ability to access and meaningfully engage with online teaching and learning materials. Zalat, Hamed, and Bolbol's (2021) research uncovered that the most significant challenges associated with online teaching and learning were related to insufficient or unstable internet connectivity, inadequate

computer facilities, a lack of computers or laptops, and technical difficulties.

Krull and De Klerk (2021) contend that two narratives regarding online teaching and learning are currently prevalent in South Africa. These narratives suggest that online instruction is more demanding and challenging than face-to-face education and that online learning is inferior to in-person education. Krull and De Klerk (2021) further assert that these perspectives could be attributed to faculty burnout and the complexities and inequalities within the higher education sector, exacerbated by the emergency transition to remote teaching prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that the reluctance to embrace online teaching is primarily rooted in entrenched inequalities pervasive throughout the country, thus affecting numerous higher education institutions.

Additionally, the geographical placement of several South African universities in rural areas with poor network connectivity could contribute to students' inability to participate in remote classes. Frequent power outages also significantly disrupt teaching and learning in South African higher institutions. While not exclusively a university concern, these issues greatly impact the educational process. Thus, it is advisable for university administrations to collaborate with network providers and electricity companies to devise strategies for mitigating these challenges.

It is conceivable that NAs/NUTs' preference for face-to-face interaction stems from negative experiences and difficulties encountered with online platforms, as previously highlighted. Furthermore, this preference could be influenced by the notion ingrained in NAs/NUTs that face-to-face teaching is more effective due to their own educational experiences. Moreover, the limited familiarity with navigating online spaces in terms of pedagogy, creating interactive online classrooms, and conducting assessments may raise substantial concerns

for NAs/NUTs regarding online teaching. Concerns about online teaching and learning include its potential to isolate students and its lack of accessibility and user-friendliness, which impose substantial pressure on academics. Naik (2016) supports this perspective by arguing that online learning is not an ideal model for advancing student learning in higher education institutions.

During induction sessions, we consistently emphasize the significance of academic professionalization, as it equips educators with theoretical approaches and optimal pedagogical practices for effective online teaching. An additional emphasis in the context of online teaching is the need for NAs/NUTs to engage in scholarly teaching and learning. This entails attending workshops, conferences, and webinars focused on online instruction, enabling them to glean best practices from peers within the higher education sector.

Implications of the Paper on Higher Education Institutions

The expressions of preference for face-to-face instruction over online teaching among educators highlight the need to instill agility and adaptability. This is imperative for them to embrace new methodologies necessitated by unforeseen circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is crucial that higher education institutions and support structures for staff development ensure that all faculty members are equipped with the requisite skills, knowledge, and expertise in online pedagogies and learning management system (LMS) platforms utilized within their institutions. This need arises from the fact that the prevailing reliance on traditional face-to-face teaching approaches makes the potential of online teaching and learning seem less significant. This stance of prioritizing in-person instruction might hinder their exposure to modern technological approaches essential for 21st-century teachers. It is our contention that higher education institutions, particularly Academic Development (AD) practitioners,

should reconsider and devise more effective strategies to help university teachers appreciate the benefits and possibilities of online instruction. This entails engagements that facilitate a comprehensive grasp of online and technology-driven teaching methodologies, coupled with tailored training to simplify, and demystify online teaching, thereby alleviating any apprehensions. This perspective aligns with the assertion by Krull and De Klerk (2021) that teachers should recognize the potential for social learning across various platforms, not solely confined to physical classrooms or campuses.

CONCLUSIONS

For novice academics, transitioning to online teaching and learning represents a foray into unfamiliar contexts, potentially causing them to feel like outsiders. This shift contradicts the pedagogical norms they experienced during their own student years. Considering this, questions arise:

How can AD practitioners develop alternative methods to foster a culture of innovative teaching and learning that aligns with the demands of unprecedented events such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

How can we, as AD practitioners, facilitate the integration of online teaching and learning for new faculty members entering the university environment?

Drawing from these questions, the study's conclusions emphasize the necessity of adaptability, innovative thinking, and adequate support to navigate challenges posed by unexpected events and to ensure the successful integration of online teaching and learning practices, particularly for new university teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating an environment where novice academics feel secure in comprehending the significance and advantages of online teaching and learning is crucial. Achieving this entails providing training on the institution's learning

management system as part of their induction into teaching roles within higher education. Assumptions about their familiarity with online modalities should be avoided, as proficiency in this area may vary. Furthermore, it is important to communicate that network challenges are not confined to specific regions, and educators should be encouraged to explore alternate ways of engaging students despite such obstacles. Collaborative discussions among faculty

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- members can foster the sharing of best practices for enhancing student participation.
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