ISSN 2521-0262 Print: African Perspectives of Research in Teaching & Learning-Vol 5 (2): (2021)

APORTAL VOL5 (2)

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, ONLINE LEARNING, AND THE UBIQUITY OF PEDAGOGIC AND ASSESSMENT DYSPHORIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual research paper endorses that Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) has exhumed a plethora of challenges, opportunities, and myths in education. The effects of lockdown and restrictions on human contact and movements have resulted in innovations in pedagogic, assessment, and administrative practices. Learning, administration, and related services shifted from the traditional face-to-face approach to the online practices which became part of the new norm. This qualitative analysis examines the narratives of the digital divide gap in Zimbabwean university education. It borrows from Lloyd Morrisett, an American experimental psychologist who contributed immensely to the determinants and implications of the digital divide gap. The study acknowledges that students, lecturers, and administrators realised the need and engaged in some form of digital training to support the new pedagogic, assessment, and administrative approaches. The researcher argues that there are a plethora of hypocrisies, myths, and facades related to the digital divide gap that were ignored and still need to be mitigated. The study recommends the need to implement emancipatory pedagogic strategies that are coupled with access to technology that empowers the students with minimum guidance from lecturers and administrators.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, digital divide, African university, pedagogy, assessment, dysphoria

INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) first appeared in Wuhan city of China at the end of 2019. The rapid worldwide spreading of COVID-19 prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it as a 'pandemic' on 11 March 2020 (Kapasia, Paul, Roy., Saha, Zaveri, Mallick, Chouhan, 2020). "As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, so do the risks we face. The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped at national borders. It has affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender. But the same has not been true for its consequences, which have hit the most vulnerable hardest" (Schleicher, 2020, p.4). In Africa, COVID-19's most consequential impacts on education have been identified as the "widening of inequalities, increase in marginalisation, and the inability of the most disadvantaged students to pursue their studies and acquire knowledge and skills that support a healthy transition to adulthood" (Mukute, Francis, Burt & De Souza, 2020,p.2).

Globally, most activities halted. Projects were slowed down and closed, institutions were shut down. The world was closed and locked (Angdhiri, 2020). It is estimated that cross the globe, over 1.2 billion lost their right to education in the process of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic (Matimaire, 2020). Students had to shift to

the online mode of teaching and learning so as to continue with their education. The model is viewed as the best alternative to minimise the risk of face to face learning in universities (Angdhiri, 2020).

"Many countries are now shifting to distance learning delivery modes, whether through distributing physical packets of materials for students or through using technology to facilitate online learning" (Winthrop, 2020, p.1). The COVID-19 pandemic has unearthed the failure by the government to provide parity in digital learning with the vulnerable learners on the receiving end. The pandemic has compromised the right to education for the poor and vulnerable students (Matimaire, 2020). "This crisis has also unmasked the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems – from access to broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs" (Schleicher, 2020, p.10). During the lockdown most students had depression and anxiety caused by challenges related to shortage of gadgets, unconducive home learning environment, poor connectivity, power outage and technical skills (Kapasia et al, 2020). The researcher submits that some lecturers, students, administrators, and parents particularly from the vulnerable section of the society had a unique share of challenges emanating from the long-existing digital divide gap. In this theoretical paper, the researcher reviews the literature on the narrative of the digital divide gap in universities in Zimbabwe as unearthed by the COVID-19 pandemic with a special focus on pedagogic and assessment dysphoria. The study accepts that the ripple effects of the pandemic on pedagogy and assessment caused anxiety, despondency, depression, dejection, and restlessness, particularly on poor and vulnerable students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

African universities like the rest of the world have turned to online learning as a stopgap measure to continue education while containing the spread of the virus. E-learning has become a central talking point in African settings. "In Sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe is a typical example where debate is raging over the need for government to set up human and financial resources to address affordability, access, and availability of infrastructure, devices, internet, and content to aid e-learning" (Matimaire, 2020, p.2). Digital technologies redefine what, how, when, and where students are taught and learn (Schleicher, 2020). The researcher attests that this innovation has its share of challenges in the pedagogic and assessment processes in Zimbabwean universities such as cost, access, and knowledge. In the stratified universities, it can be inferred that turning to online learning increased the digital divide gap between those with access to information and those without given the limited time to prepare against the devastating rate of the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the conceptual framework approach. "A conceptual framework represents the researcher's synthesis of the literature on how to explain a phenomenon. It maps out the actions required in the course of the study, given his previous knowledge of other researchers' point of view and his observations on the subject of research" (Regoniel, 2015.para 4). A conceptual framework can also be broadly considered as "a type of research synthesis that is conducted by review groups with specialized skills, who set out to identify and retrieve evidence that is relevant to a particular question or questions and to appraise and synthesize the results of this search to inform practice, policy and in some cases, further research" (Munn, Peters, Stern, Tufanaru, McArthur & Aromataris, 2018, para1). In other words, conceptual research consists of a research map in which the researcher demonstrates his or her

understanding of key issues and variables in a coherent study.

According to Regoniel (2015), conceptual research involves the following basic steps.

1. Choose your topic

"Decide on what will be your research topic. The topic should be within your field of specialization" (para7). In this case, the topic is, *The COVID-19 pandemic, online learning, and the ubiquity of pedagogic and assessment dysphoria in Higher Education in Zimbabwe*. The topic is within the researcher's area of specialisation that is the sociology of inequality in Higher Education. The main question was, how *does the digital divide in Higher Education contribute to the assessment and pedagogic dysphoria during online learning in the COVID-19 era?*

2. Choose a theory or theories

The researcher hinged the study on the digital divide theory by Lloyd Morrisett. To link the study with pedagogy, Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory was also included.

3. Do a literature review

The researcher did review the recent literature and noted that the recurring themes under online learning centred on the pedagogic and assessment challenges faced by stakeholders in higher education hence decided to present the unique as specific variables. Peer-reviewed and well-known scientific journals were used as sources of reliable information.

4. Isolate the important variables

The variables in this study are pedagogic and assessment challenges of online learning for lecturers, students and administrators as attributed to the digital divide gap.

5. Generate the conceptual framework

The study links important variables such as online learning, assessment, pedagogy, and digital inequality in Higher Education. New gaps in knowledge have been unearthed particularly on how the COVID -19 pandemic has exposed the digital inequalities that exist between the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups of people. The observation is that not only students and parents face this divide but also lecturers and administrators do. This may sound absurd at face value but it is real challenge that needs to be addressed.

The digital divide gap theory

Eubank (2007) avers that Lloyd Morrisett, founder of the Sesame Street Workshop and then president of the Markle Foundation, is credited with inventing the term the "Digital Divide" in 1996 to describe the chasm that purportedly separates "information haves" from "information have-nots. Similarly, Mila (2001) also expounds that the term Digital Divide came to public attention after a 1995 study by the Markle Foundation revealed that the "same divergence found in society along cultural and racial lines is also found online and offline". Lloyd Morrisett, the former president of the Markle Foundation, called it a "digital divide" between the information "haves" and "have-nots."

> *There remains, however, the danger that the current crisis (COVID-19 pandemic) ultimately increases the 'digital divide' in education between those with access to technologies, even television, and those without. Several studies signalled the potential social challenges of having a 'two-stream approach to education: one for those with access to technology, and another, lesser, system for those without (EduTech Hub, 2020, p.4).*

The concept 'digital divide' implies

that the existing social inequalities translate to digital inequalities where we have the information haves and the have-nots. Galperin (2010) and Mila (2001) expound that the digital divide gap goes beyond computer ownership, cost involved and internet services. It is redefined by more factors. "Although there are various free and commercial tools that could be used for e-learning, keys to harnessing these platforms are access, affordability, and availability of infrastructure, digital gadgets, internet and content" (Matimaire, 2020, p.4). It now redefined to include technical support, technical knowledge, digital literacy, and broadband services that are all primary in the digital learning mode (Matimaire, 2020). Lloyd Morrisett posits in the digital divide gap the poor and vulnerable are the most disadvantaged (Mila, 2001). When transposed to education, universities in the low-income community are less able to obtain digital information or learn and offer skills. The study proffers the argument that in Zimbabwean higher education, the digital divide gap is more likely to affect the vulnerable students from low-income families. The study acknowledges that Zimbabwean universities are not in the same class in terms of financial status and access to information and communication technologies. Some are better than others and have been coping well with online learning before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are students from the vulnerable sections of society in struggling universities who were severely affected by the pedagogic and assessment innovation. This links the digital divide theory with Bourdieu's cultural capital theory.

Bourdieu's cultural capital theory

According to Bourdieu, education has two functions namely

1. Cultural reproduction

2. Social elimination

Cultural reproduction

Bourdieu as a neo-Marxist theorist refutes the functionalist assertion that education transmits the culture of the whole society. He argues that education transmits the culture of the dominant groups in society as it reproduces their culture and vested interests (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). The dominant groups in society have cultural and financial capital (Azubuike, Adegboye, & Quadri, 2020), which gives their children an edge in education compared to their counterparts from non-affluent backgrounds. The education system is tilted in favour of the children from the affluent background in terms of content, pedagogy, and evaluation criteria. When it comes to online learning, pedagogy, and assessment, those children from affluent backgrounds have an edge over those from poor backgrounds because they have the cultural and financial capital they get from their families. They can afford the technical knowledge, gadgets, language, and data that are required in online learning, pedagogy, and assessment. As such, affluent children are better placed for success in education. On the other hand, Azubuike et al, (2020) argue that children from the dominated families who lack cultural and financial capital needed in the online learning environments do experience cultural and digital shock and are condemned to failure.

Social elimination

Besides cultural reproduction, Bourdieu also posits that education plays a social function of elimination (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Social elimination is accomplished in two ways namely examination failure and self-elimination. Due to their relative lack of cultural capital (Azubuike et al, 2020, Haralambos & Holborn, 2013, Vurayai, 2020), non-affluent children are likely to fail examinations because of the content, pedagogy, and evaluation that are tilted in favour of the affluent. Examination failure prevents

children from non-affluent backgrounds from entering higher levels of education. Because the non-affluent children know that the education system is loaded against them, they are likely to leave the education system of their own volition. This accounts for higher proportions of elimination.

The pedagogic challenges and the digital divide gap

This pandemic caused havoc and disruption in the education sector. Online teaching as a pedagogical innovation affected lecturer productivity and the social life of the students (Vadharman, 2020). Lecturers, lacked the proper training to manage remote learning using the digital tools and services. This was made worse by the challenges related to infrastructure, power supply, and technical knowledge (EduTech Hub, 2020).

Probably lecturers were more shocked as they wondered how to proceed without the requisite training for remote learning. Winthrop (2020) avers that lecturers like any other individual were affected by the pandemic, they also had an obligation to protect their families from the scourge of the pandemic while expected to guide in remote learning (Winthrop, 2020). Lecturers were given short notice regarding the closure of the university while they were expected to plan for continuity in learning (EduTech Hub, 2020; Winthrop, 2020). Like the rest of the workers, they were given short notice on these pedagogic and assessment changes. The outbreak of COVID-19 meant a sudden change to remote means of learning in HE in areas such as lectures, seminars, examinations and conferences (Kapasia et al, 2020). This approach brought massive effects on the duties of the lecturers for example, the workload and planning time increased enormously (Mukute et al, 2020).

Lecturers and students had challenges in connectivity issues (Vadharman, 2020). This applied to those with the required gadgets to access the internet. The researcher submits that there were other students who did not have these gadgets at all, and lecturers could hardly get in touch with them. Arguably, these were painstaking experiences. Lecturers also had to use and apply the pedagogical approaches they never trained and had to use trial and error method (Schleicher, 2020). The study attests that very few lecturers in Zimbabwe had training in the use of online platforms and tools save for those teaching ICT skills and modules. Turning to online teaching related experiences and materials at short notice was a mammoth task to the teachers who had no skills in ICT (Vadharman, 2020).

Moreover, online teaching turned to be more appropriate for theoretical modules but proved to be a hurdle for practical elements and modules (Harsha, 2020). Essentially, most practical modules in sciences and technology were affected because they required the lecturers to take the students through by hand. Difficult and new concepts also proved hard to deliver to the learners (Mukute et al, 2020). The lecturers needed to be with the students to take them through the practicals rather than doing them online and theoretically. In this case, online learning created a pedagogic dilemma. The study theorises that most online pedagogic approaches are one-way and can hardly promote active student participation particularly the vulnerable who struggle with access to digital information and devices.

> *…there are real risks because many of these approaches can be very solitary and didactic when you're just asking students to sit and quietly watch videos, read documents online, or click-through presentations—that's really dull. The worst form of learning is to sit passively and listen, and this may be the form that most students will receive during university closures. It serves no one well, especially those who are the furthest behind*

(Winthrop, 2020, p.8)

The online pedagogic approach treated the vulnerable students as passive recipients waiting to be filled with content from the lecturers. It is a transmission model with limited input from the students. Through this approach, the lectures had gone back to the condemned banking concept (Freire, 1970) of education in which

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought for.
- The teacher talks and the students listen.
- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply.
- The teacher chooses the programme content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it.

Given the numerous challenges associated with the online pedagogic approach, disadvantaged students were more likely to be passive recipients in their modules. Such a transmission pedagogic approach does not allow for critical thinking (See Freire, 1970). Like Freire argued, there is a need to enhance dialogue, creativity as these empower the students and allow them to become active participants, critical thinkers and tolerant of divergent opinions.

Lecturers used many platforms to reach the students such as Zoom, Google classroom and others. Now the challenge was to select the best platform that would reach the student with fewer hustles (Harsha, 2020). This left many students without access to education. Free data were given at some point but would not support some tools like Zoom resulting in unreliable connectivity (Angdhiri, 2020). TV broadcasts were also used to reach to the students but the coverage was not even across the different subjects (Schleicher, 2020). The biggest challenge for lecturers was to keep students attentive from the distractions of the social media while on the digital gadgets meant for formal learning (Vadharman, 2020). This mostly affected the vulnerable who had limited experience with online applications.

The assessment challenges and the digital divide gap

Most lecturers and students lost considerable time for adequate syllabus coverage due to the disruptions caused (Matimaire, 2020). Apart from pedagogic challenges, most Zimbabwean universities had other hurdles in assessment and examinations. Teaching and student assessments have moved online with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many assessments were postponed and cancelled. Notably, such disturbances would imply long term effects on the career prospects of the students (Vadharman, 2020). More evidence reveals that;

> *Many universities struggled and lacked the experience and time they needed to conceive new ways to deliver instruction and assignments. Examinations were also affected, disrupting students' learning trajectories and progression. Although many higher education institutions offered online courses before the pandemic, few students considered it as the sole alternative to physical in-person learning- (Schleicher, 2020, p.10)*

The study endorses that the assessment process had its share of challenges that posed anxiety and challenges on lecturers, students, administrators, and parents given a plethora of obstacles at hand.

Besides the pedagogic hurdles in the practical modules as discussed above, the same was experienced in assessing the practicum modules across the Zimbabwean universities.

> *The training institutions have not taken advantage of the affordances of technology to rethink their traditional practices of practicum assessment. While they have embarked on online teaching for other modules, they are yet to find ways of using the same technology to crack the practicum assessment conundrum (Moyo, 2020, p.544).*

"Unlike other academic modules which could be completed via online and distance education, the practicum, being a practical undertaking in a classroom situation, presented unique challenges" (Moyo, 2020, p.536). These students are also struggling with pedagogical and assessment dysphoria, much the same way as their lecturers. To make matters worse, they also needed to be assessed under these obstacles. "While the university could arrange to teach so that learning should continue via various online platforms, the same could not be done for students on practicum. This is because universities have remained closed thus making it practically impossible" (Moyo, 2020, p.536). This hurdle made most practicum modules impossible for assessment which the universities either cancelled or postponed.

Over and above all, the test and examination scores particularly for the vulnerable if at all they managed to take the assessment are likely to be very low. This may in the long run affect their job market in cases where transcript scores are used for ranking and shortlisting.

> *We know that some students who use ed-tech during the pandemic will have a poor experience because they're not used to it. Some people will say, "During the virus, we tried the ed-tech-enabled learning approaches, it was terrible, and look at my test scores." Yes, this will happen. People's test scores will be impacted (Winthrop, 2020,p.4).*

Given this situation, the assessment dysphoria and its effects on test scores are likely to have a long-term negative impact on the confidence and efficacy of the students concerning their potential in the modules they took during the pandemic.

Students' challenges and the digital divide gap

Students from geographically isolated areas and marginalised sections of the society were severely affected (Kapasia et al, 2020). Most importantly, in Zimbabwe, most students in rural areas faced challenges like power outage, limited bandwidth, connectivity, technical support and infrastructure (Matimaire, 2020). This study suggests targeted interventions to create a positive space for study among students from the vulnerable sections of society.

Students with limited or no access to the digital gadgets have a compromised right to education. By implication, the students have to wait until the pandemic dies, but that seems to be not in the near future (Angdhiri, 2020). The true victims of these challenges are the students from underfunded universities (Angdhiri, 2020). Students from different families access the digital gadgets differently and some may never do. Such students hardly access online lectures (Vadharman, 2020). Students from affluent background have the capacity to access the university education remotely during the lockdown with limited or no challenges. On the other hand, poor students may borrow the gadgets (Matimaire, 2020), however, challenges such as data affordability will not spare them.

> *Some cannot even afford to purchase the subsidised or discounted data offered by the internet service providers for e-learning. Data charges, internet coverage, and technical skills required by lecturers and students to utilise digital platforms and tools for e-learning remain a stumbling block towards*

> *the advancement of the edu-tech revolution. (*Matimaire, 2020, *p.4-5)*

This study confirms that "those from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their universities shut down" (Schleicher, 2020, p.4). An assessment by Matimaire, 2020) adds:

> *In the current situation, Zimbabwe cannot fully embrace e-learning, as it would prejudice and be discriminatory to persons without internet access or those who cannot afford access to the internet. Students in rural and marginalised communities do not have the capacity in terms of hardware (mobile phones or other devices that facilitate access to the internet), infrastructure, and finances to access the e-learning portals. (p4)*

Many educators and students in Southern Africa struggle to raise the required gadgets and accessories for online learning (Mukute et al, 2020). Zimbabwe is still grappling with the economic crisis (Vurayai, 2020) to an extent that the salaries of many workers are so paltry to afford these gadgets for all their children. Besides, the challenge of raising the gadgets, there is yet a challenge regarding the unreliable power supply (Matimaire, 2020). To make the problem more severe, the unreliable power supply would make the learning time too limited especially when working on a shared computer which is more common in the poor families (Mukute et al, 2020)

The online discriminates against the poor and vulnerable students. The most affected are girls, the rural poor, refugees and other marginalised ethnic groups (Mukute et al, 2020). Students with hearing impairment had a share of their challenges (Kapasia et al, 2020). Such students with special needs in the most marginalised groups, had a high risk of falling behind their peers (Schleicher, 2020). They required special assistive devices compatible with the required digital platforms which they could not afford.

It is important to consider the affective domain of the students in the learning and assessment processes because the challenges of the pandemic can be very demanding. According to Angdhiri (2020) most students had a stressful home learning environment. They added that the online learning had its own social costs of limited socialisation with friends. This challenge was more severe on the poor and vulnerable. Due to lack of access to digital information, interaction with friends for academic and social needs was very limited. Moreover, the restrictions made it impossible to access gadgets and knowledge from other peers leaving them more isolated at the periphery. There is a prediction that;

> *People will become unhappy because their mental health effects of being isolated will be profound. We must be prepared for that. Those poor experiences are really important to learn what does and doesn't work. There's something magic about that in-person connection, that bond between lecturers and their students. Having that face-to-face connection with students and being able to support them across their unique skills—that's very hard to replicate in a distance learning environment (Winthrop, 2020, p.1).*

This study also acknowledges that the vulnerable learners were more affected in the sense that they were further detached from their teachers who in the traditional face-to-face would provide remedial and extra help.

COVID-19, administrative challenges and the digital divide gap

Although the administrators are not directly involved in pedagogic and assessment activities, the changes in them

were cascaded to their responsibilities. They realised that the lecturers had been given planning time to deal with the urgent demands of online learning but they too were experiencing a novel administrative challenge to allow learning to continue under the hard and challenging new normal (Winthrop, 2020). The university provided limited equipment and service to allow online learning to continue because they too were caught unprepared. Many universities were not prepared to implement remote learning (Angdhiri, 2020). The administrators have borne a great burden regarding the new demands posed by online learning such as connectivity, training of staff members to gear up for new pedagogical approaches, and facilitating new approaches to assessment and examinations. Whenever assessment and examinations were cancelled, the administrators were criticised and blamed by students who could not bear the anxiety. In some cases, "students are already demanding a partial refund of their tuition fees and many institutions have made pro-rata refunds on room and board, or have offered fee deferrals" (Schleicher, 2020, p.10). In such a case, administrators had financial setbacks and complications.

Parental challenges and the digital divide gap

The challenges that teachers, administrators, and students faced were also cascaded to the parents since the home became the prime working environment. "A parent in Zimbabwe shared how her four children in different classes have to compete for one digital device to support their online learning. Many parents were either unwilling or unable to provide the necessary enabling learning environment and support in the home" (Mukute et al, 2020, p.6). It is not only lecturers struggling but parents and other stakeholders who are trying to make learning continue under the new normal (Winthrop, 2020). Parents, who have technical knowledge and support had a better chance to assist their children in digital learning as compared to their counterparts (Mukute et al, 2020). "Families with too few computers have to compete for the limited resource, with parents needing to use the computers for work and adult learning, and children needing to use them for university and college work" (Mukute et al, 2020, p.5). More detailed anecdotes unearth that;

> *The pandemic has made the home a place for continued education and learning. But not all homes in southern Africa are suitable for student and adult learning. At a very basic level, many families do not have the space for both parents and students to work from home, which leads to competition for the use of limited home space for teaching, learning, and work (Mukute et al, 2020, p.6)*

The cost for data and electricity were more on the shoulders of the parents who were already struggling with other family needs. In another study;

> *A snap survey indicated that unlimited monthly data costs an average of USD 50 across internet service providers. This technically infringes on the affordability of the internet, which is a key element towards the e-learning matrix, considering that civil servants who constitute the bulk of Zimbabwe's formal employees earn a paltry salary (Matimaire, 2020, p.5).*

Given the economic challenges faced by Zimbabwean parents, it can be inferred that to the majority of the families, e-learning was a burdening affair. There is little doubt that their children lagged due to the digital divide gap.

Way forward

The presence of COVID-19 is

predicted to change people's life permanently in spheres like education, work and leisure (Angdhiri, 2020). The infrastructural facilities should be availed to the education institutions which can regulate the digital learning process during future health emergencies. Adequate funding and capacity development programmes are needed urgently in higher education institutions if they are to be empowered to also serve other sectors in digital learning as part of its role in society (Kapasia et al, 2020). Additionally, there is a great need to have more offline facilities and material for learning to cater for those who may not access education digitally for example by providing books, pamphlets, magazines and other relevant material (Angdhiri, 2020). Interventions should aim to assist the most vulnerable groups of society who have been for long left behind due to the digital divide gap (Kapasia et al, 2020).

The African Declaration advocates for equitable digital rights and there is need to borrow from these principles for implementation in poor African countries as they work on the roadmap to effective online learning (Matimaire, 2020). "Likewise, SADC member states, including Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, and South Africa have developed Education Sector COVID-19 response plans or strategies which would provide the basis for effective online learning in Zimbabwe" (Mukute et al, 2020, p.2). In this situation, the government should make effort to allow universities and other institutions of HE to build strong networks that support effective online learning and reduce the digital divide gap (Angdhiri, 2020). To remain relevant, HE needs to spearhead infrastructure development and technical support for sustainable online learning that also serve the marginalised groups (Schleicher, 2020, p.10).

SUMMARY

This conceptual paper, interrogated how the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the pedagogic and assessment dysphoria in higher education in Zimbabwe. The pandemic caused anxiety, depression, restlessness and dejection among lecturers, students, administrators, and parents who had to cope with the rapid innovations in pedagogy and assessment. Pedagogy and assessment had to shift from traditional face-to-face to the online mode on short notice leaving those with and without access to digital information receiving different forms of education thereby widening the digital divide gap.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the maginalised and vulnerable students such as the rural, poor, and disabled were more affected by the digital divide gap. The stakeholders had not prepared for the demands posed by online learning like training, knowledge, costs, connectivity, gadgets, and conducive home learning environment. Most practical modules were severely affected since they could not be harnessed by the online mode. There were delays in syllabus coverage and some assessments were cancelled hence creating anxiety and depression among the students and teachers. The pandemic fired warning shots to universities to invest in learning technologies to prepare for the worst in the future so that learning is not affected.

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