

Editorial

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In the last decades, many governments wished to enhance socio-economic development through the creation of knowledge economies. To achieve this, access to higher education was at the forefront of the agenda. This generally yielded positive results and led to the massification of higher education (HE). South Africa was no different with access being embedded within the government's transformation of higher education programme. More recently, along with the growth of student enrolments, the mode of study has been changing. There has been an exponential increase in online learning courses and programmes within traditional higher education institutions worldwide. These may be offered completely online or through a blended mode of delivery. An important aspect of online learning is that it offers students the flexibility to learn anywhere at any time. This is particularly suited to those in employment or who have responsibilities that do not allow for learning to take place at preset times in a particular location.

The advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has opened further opportunities for learning. These are offered by high-ranking universities through to smaller and emerging institutions. Knowledge, skills and competencies can be achieved without the concomitant fees, albeit without certification. MOOCs are sometimes hailed as the democratization of knowledge.

Innovation has occurred in pedagogy using technology, for example, the use of learning management systems (LMS), such as Moodle and Blackboard. More recently, virtual and augmented reality tools are being used. These can be delivered in virtual classrooms and provide students with learning experiences that would be otherwise very expensive both in equipment and in fees.

This first edition of the 15th volume of *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL)* coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many countries, including South Africa, have shut down schools as well as vocational and higher education institutions in the last months in attempts to control the spread of the virus. This has led to an uptake of online learning in institutions that may have limited or no prior experience in offering this mode of learning.

It is apt, then, that the first two articles deal with aspects of open and distance learning (ODL); i.e. the use of e-tutors and online assessment respectively. E-tutors' experiences of online learning were sought in a qualitative study in South Africa's largest ODL higher education institution. The model of using e-tutors was found to bring a number of benefits for students not only in learning but also in motivation and support that the e-tutors provide. This, in turn, improves pass rates. This model is worth pursuing, particularly in the current crisis. While the first article is concerned with the learning process in ODL, the second investigates computer-assisted assessment in an ODL context at a contact institution. (Of course, this type of assessment

is not only the province of ODL.) The authors use a qualitative study to determine lecturers' experiences of computer-assisted assessment. Whilst challenges were identified, the study showed that it has a positive part to play in ODL assessment.

It is common knowledge that South Africa has a major problem with violence against women; sadly, its rape statistics are amongst the highest in the world. This violence extends to intimate relationships within institutions of higher learning. Needless to say, this severely compromises the mental and physical health of female students and negatively affects their education. In the third article, in a qualitative study using Emerson's social exchange theory, the impact of violent intimate relationships is investigated. The authors recommend that university management needs to be proactive in supporting and empowering female students. Whilst this is a societal problem, universities can do much to promote gender equality and contribute to changing notions of 'masculinity'.

The last article in the higher education cluster considers experiential learning for third-year Bachelor of Education students through a participatory action research project in schools. The study found that stakeholder engagement was not only beneficial for students in the schools but also for in-service teachers.

The following four articles deal with various aspects of school education ranging from professional development of teachers and teacher resilience to teacher collegiality and to learner-centred teaching.

The first in this cluster, whilst acknowledging the need for professional development opportunities for teachers, evidence of effectiveness is scant. The authors explored through pre-testing and semi-structured interviews the use of Lesson Study as a means to yield improvement in teaching. The results were positive. Structured collaboration, peer observation and critical reflection between teachers contribute to effective teaching. The author recommends that school-based professional development activities be used as these are grounded in everyday teaching. Since external workshops tend to be one-off, they may contain little context and not be translated into classroom practice.

In the following article, the notion of 'teacher resilience' and its manifestations in practising teachers is explored in a Ugandan school through a qualitative study. The author found that despite a challenging environment, teachers demonstrate resilience in their professional lives. This is worthy of acknowledgement. The effect of teachers providing paid extra lessons to students is investigated in the next paper. It was found that this has a detrimental effect on teacher collegiality, which has a negative impact on student learning. The authors recommend that attention be given to working conditions of teachers so that this micro commercialisation activity is not needed to maintain a decent standard of living.

The article in the Practitioners' Corner provides a literature review on learner-centred approaches to the teaching of Business Studies in the last three grades of schooling. A number of practical recommendations are made.

The Doctoral Corner comprises abstracts of recently awarded doctoral degrees. These are concerned with professional development, practical education, and student learning. The publication of abstracts alerts researchers and practitioners to new research in their areas of interest.