

Journalism pedagogy and ICTs in a time of pandemic: A case study of selected journalism schools in Southern Africa

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Abstract

The paper explores journalism pedagogy in selected Southern African journalism schools. It draws from two South African Universities: The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Journalism Department and the School of Communication at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). From Zimbabwe, it draws on Journalism and Media Departments: The National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and Media and Society Studies at Midlands State University (MSU). The paper utilises the Domestication theory and Replacement model as theoretical paradigms to assess how the selected journalism schools reconfigured teaching and learning on their practical and theoretical subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Semi-structured interviews are used with students and journalism educators to understand strategies adopted in the deployment of lectures. The study aims at understanding the teaching techniques that were adopted by journalism educators during the pandemic and how students adopted to virtual delivered education. Lastly, we solicit views from students who were already seeking or had been placed on attachment or work-related learning to establish how they readjusted, if at all. The study found that teaching practical courses was a challenge because, for

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example, editing suits for film and radio courses are housed on campus. For Zimbabwean universities, the challenge was that students were not given data by the University for online learning while lecturers' data was not enough for their teaching. This is in contrary to South Africa where both lecturers and students were given data, laptops and other gadgets for online learning. Despite challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, lecturers received training on how to conduct online lessons and restructured their syllabus to ensure that it meets the demands of the 'new normal'.

Keywords

COVID-19, journalism schools, South Africa, Zimbabwe.

Introduction and context

Journalism education in Southern Africa is, as elsewhere in the world, at crossroads. This is due to changing socio-economic, political and technological circumstances, as well as changes in education, journalism and the media system itself. Agreeing with this notion, Banda et al. (2015) articulates that, in order to understand journalism education in Southern Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, there is need to recognise that it is a product of larger social and political conditions. This challenge was observed by a Zimbabwean journalism scholar cited in Banda et al. (2015) stating 'there is a challenge in building African textbooks and resources into the curriculum, so that when we train, we are not just using materials informed by Western experience. The lecturers themselves also need to be aware of the African perspective'. The challenge for the future, therefore, is to integrate these contextual conditions more and more into the very epistemological assumptions upon which theories of journalism and curricula for journalism education are based.

As Berger (2008) observes, 'the changing atmosphere is further compounded by the fact that much discourse on specifically journalism education still originates within and focuses upon democratic Anglophone countries of high media density'. This is the challenge that Banda et al. (2015) laments stating, 'Journalism education in Southern Africa must contend with defining a new academic identity for itself, extricating itself from dependency on Western oriented models of journalism education and training'. Journalism education has been deeply influenced by the political and socio-economic changes of the early 1990s, while it also has to face a rather unmapped future (De Beer, 1995) with the most recent challenge to journalism education, for South Africa specifically, being the student protests, which started at the end of 2015, questioning the high

costs of education and demanding ‘decolonisation’ of curricula. The cadetship model has also been affected with the drastic contraction of newsrooms that removes the promise of jobs upon graduation and the swiftly shifting digital terrain rearranges the financial basis of all journalism. These factors introduce a dynamism and uncertainty into South African journalism that educators are compelled to respond to with imagination and principle (Garman & van der Merwe, 2007).

Much as these studies are more inclined to the decolonisation of the curricula and the socio-economic and political changes, this study will inquire how journalism education in Southern Africa has been reconfigured by the COVID-19 pandemic that forced students and educators to an online oriented form of learning. This will be demonstrated through semi-structured interviews undertaken with lecturers and students in selected countries and respective universities under study. In the broader discussion that follows, we argue that the quality of journalism has been compromised by COVID-19 pandemic as it forced students to miss out on practical journalism training or on the job training. Such a form of training, for institutions in Zimbabwe and some universities in South Africa, is a prerequisite for job placement in the journalism and media studies field. The chapter proceeds by reviewing literature related to journalism education in Southern Africa. In this section, we acknowledge the various debates on journalism education especially on the need to decolonise education. The chapter then discusses the replacement and domestication model, which forms the basis of the theoretical lens of study. The methodological processes undertaken in gathering and analysing data will be discussed next. We then conclude this study by discussing the study’s findings.

Journalism education in Africa: A review

Journalism education in the Global South is yet to fully attract substantial scholarly inquiry. Few studies on journalism education in the Global South have looked at decolonisation and ‘de-westernisation’ (Dube, 2010), meaning based practice (Hochheimer, 2001), history of journalism education (Murphy & Scotton, 1987), journalism education and training (Banda et al., 2007) and journalism education and practice (Motsaathebe, 2011). However, these studies do not adequately capture the prevailing macro environment in the journalism education sphere. The political changes and shifts of the past decade have exerted pressure on journalism training which for decades had been ‘Eurocentric’ with a demand to decolonise and de-westernise emphasising African culture and values. The past decade has seen the rise of movements, especially at

South African university campuses, under the banner of RhodesMustFall and Africanising the curricula (Bhambra et al., 2018; Murriss, 2016). At the core of this call was the attempt to deracialize and free the African university from the colonial infrastructure. Journalism departments have not been spurred by these calls.

As Kasoma (1994) argued decades earlier, theoretical literature on regulatory issues is often invoked by African cultural intermediaries to also imply the regulation of content, as well as notions of African morality, decency and virtue. This ambivalence is what leads Kasoma (2000) to conclude that, ‘this category confusion – between industry regulation on the one hand, and morality on the other – is underpinned with injunctions for the institution of content barriers to “protect” Africans from the allegedly insidious influences of so-called (western) “foreign culture”, “alien” genres of reporting’. Before discussing journalism education in the Global South, the study will briefly highlight the debates that have been in place around the subject. Globally, the purpose of university journalism education is debated among different players who seek to ascertain the ‘ideal’ nature of education which students of journalism should be taught or acquire. Debates on journalism education have been on three major schools of thought: ‘journalism education is a craft with an emphasis on acquiring skills through practice; journalism education is a mix of skill acquisition and traditional liberal education; and journalism education is a critical engagement about the place of the journalist in society’ (see Rodney, 2007). In this milieu, schools of journalism have structured their curricula in such a way that they are tailored for required critical skills in the industry and theoretical grounding in media and communication skills so that journalism exerts its place in society.

The post-cold war (1990s) era geopolitics brought significant shifts in the Southern African media. Media were also affected by political events, globalising technologies and policy changes. As Tomaselli and Dunn (2001) observe, ownership, content, delivery systems, users and audiences/readers for a range of media services are thoroughly re-conceptualized throughout the Southern African Development Community. In South Africa, (one of the countries under study), journalism education ‘still has Anglo-American roots’ (De Beer et al., 2017) while there have been strong calls since independence to ‘Africanise’ the journalism curriculum by developing material that takes into account home grown solutions that are based on indigenous knowledge systems (Dube, 2010). Additionally, South African journalism training is often still ‘at odds with the needs of the media industry, emphasizing the divorce between ivory-tower research and real-life challenges’ (De Beer et al., 2017). For South

Africa again, Rodney-Gumede (2018) observes that four strands informed the trajectory of journalism and journalism education which are 're-affirmation of the role of journalism in democratic processes, the need for comparative studies and research-led teaching, journalism as active citizenship and journalism as a reflexive practice'. This new pedagogical approach had to be done appreciating the locale.

In Zimbabwe, journalism training started during the colonial era. Since the first print media house was owned by the Argus Group of South Africa, the majority white reporters were trained in South Africa and moved to Zimbabwe formerly Rhodesia to take up employment (Muchena, 2013). As Muchena (2013) further observes, soon after independence in 1980, the Division of Mass Communication at the Harare Polytechnic College started to train journalists with the sponsorship by donors to quickly fill in the gap of trained white reporters who had fled the country upon attainment of black majority rule. During this period the dominant training model of journalism in most African countries was the short course type. These short-term courses were intensified after independence as a way of inculcating a patriotic strand of journalism the post-colonial government dearly required in the media (Muchena, 2013). However, journalism education and training has since early 2000 been affected by the repressive environment which has resulted in the closure of newspapers (Chuma et al., 2020). While there has been a move by higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe to pursue journalism education, macro-economic challenges have been encountered resulting to lack of equipment and books for reading as the economic crisis has had a bearing on learning institutions (Banda et al., 2007).

Despite the challenges, it has been argued that 'journalism education in Africa is on its way, but the road ahead is steep' (Banda et al., 2007). In this chapter, we argue that COVID-19 pandemic has made the road much steeper because of various challenges it brought to the world, various sectors of the economy and institutions (Matsilele, 2020; Mututwa & Matsilele, 2020), journalism schools included. With COVID-19 regulations which forced the closure of schools and marked the end of contact lessons, universities had to move to an online teaching format. However, e-learning is being implemented in an environment that is characterised by digital inequality, poverty and other structural challenges. For South Africa, students with poor backgrounds still cannot afford to get equipment for use. Zimbabwe too has faced multi-faceted crisis that has eroded people's incomes. Given these conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a sudden reconfiguration teaching and learning, worsening the gap in accessibility to education (Matsilele, 2021). This means, traditional

ways of educating students, including sending them on a rather ad hoc way for internship and job finding missions, needed to be re-evaluated in terms of new technological, financial and other demands. In the next section, the chapter draws on the conceptual paradigm that will be adopted by this study.

Conceptual framework: Domestication and Replacement model

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the rapid use of these technologies for lectures and assessments. The pandemic accelerated the adaptation of E-learning tools fully, as students, and journalism educators adopted a ‘new normal’ pedagogy of learning (Matsilele, 2020). This meant that students had to adapt fully to using smart phones, I-pads, advanced laptops and computer software’s for lectures to proceed remotely as regulations prohibited mass gatherings like face-to-face learning (Motsaathebe, 2021). However, in order to satisfy an apt understanding of online learning that was adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic at the various institutions under study, the chapter draws on two conceptual frameworks: The Domestication and the Replacement model.

Habib (2005) states that domestication theory is ‘integration of new technologies into the domestic sphere and the “moral economy” of the household. The core idea is that objects and products go through a process of domestication that renders them fit to use in the eyes of their owners or users’. The concept helps to explain patterns of ICT usage and non-usage; and adoption and experience (Chigona et al., 2010). Hynes and Richardson (2009) further state that ‘Domestication, essentially, is about giving technology a place in everyday life. The concept catches the practical, temporal, spatial place, but most importantly, it underlines how this is mixed with the cultural as an expression of lifestyles and values’. Domestication is a concept widely used by researchers to explain how technologies and how media and computing technologies become part of our everyday life (see Vuojärvi et al., 2010). The theory seeks to explain the process in which innovations are adopted by users, especially new technology. The paradigm seeks to understand the meaning, importance and experience of technology in people’s lives (see Haddon, 2006). Thus, when people encounter ICT’s, they are either accept or reject them (Haddon, 2006).

The theory been found relevant in education and understanding ICT’s (Habib, 2005). Studies have also been done on how the model has been used to understand how domestication enables lecturers to embed e-learning into their curricula and how students integrate e-learning activities into their learning experiences showing its relevance in explaining ICT’s and education (Chigona

et al., 2010; Dagada, 2009; Dagada & Chigona, 2015). Domestication is a concept widely used by researchers to explain how technologies and, media and computing technologies become part of our everyday life (Vuojärvi et al., 2010).

Domestication occurs in four phases (Silverstone et al., 1989): the first stage is appropriation. Within this stage, a technology is acquired by an individual or household. This is then followed by the objectification stage. At this stage, through the display of technology, the user and his/her environment change to adapt accordingly (Dagada & Chigona, 2015). The third stage is the incorporation stage. At this stage, the technology is used every day and incorporated into the individuals' life for use. Lastly is the conversion stage. This stage is concerned with the relations between the households or individuals' internal/personal affairs and the public domain or outside world (Vuojärvi et al., 2010). These stages give an outline of E-learning activities were adopted by lecturers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chapter also draws on the replacement model by Carol Twig. Key within the replacement model is the reduction in class-meeting time, replacing (rather than supplementing) face-to-face time with online, interactive learning activities for students (Twig, 2003). The assumption is that certain activities can be better accomplished online, either individually or in small groups than in a class (Auster, 2016; Twig, 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, classes were online so that spelt out that students could participate anytime, anywhere. The replacement model replaces some class meetings with online activities, making significant changes in what goes on in the remaining class meetings.

Methodological premise

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with journalism educators, students on work related learning and exit level students at select universities in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Four universities participated in the study, two from each country. Purposive sampling was used for selecting the Universities, students and lecturers. Researchers purposively selected two types of universities from each participating country – a Technikon or a University of Technology and a traditional University². Technical Universities are more focused on applied instructional teaching and learning model while the traditional Universities have a theoretical bias. Lecturers and students were also purposively sampled. The lecturers chosen teach theory and applied subjects.

² From Zimbabwe and South Africa, we selected NUST and CPUT as technical universities respectively. For traditional universities, we selected the UJ and MSU for South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively.

In total, two lecturers and three students from each University were interviewed bringing the cumulative number of those interviewed to 20. The interviews were conducted between July and August 2020.

For analysis, the research employed thematic analysis which involves a process of identifying and analysing various themes within given data. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that themes are captured aspects about data in relation to the research questions and/ objectives and represent a certain level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. There are two types of thematic levels explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) and fall under semantic and latent themes. Semantic themes ‘...exist within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written’. The latent level focuses on the deeper meanings of the data and ‘...examines the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research however adopts the later.

Discussion and findings of data

The findings and analysis of the study are anchored around the following themes: i) Teaching in an online environment: perceptions from lecturers on challenges and experiences, ii) Learning in an online environment: student’s perspectives and experiences and iii) Internship students: challenges faced and experiences.

Teaching in an online environment: Perceptions from lecturers on challenges and experiences

University lecturers interviewed from NUST, MSU, CPUT and UJ agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their academic year as they had to stop face to face lectures and deliver their lectures online. This was because of the World Health Organisation guidelines and regulations implemented by the South African and Zimbabwean governments that spelt out social distancing and a ban on mass gatherings. University lectures were part of these mass gatherings. However, lecturers interviewed from MSU agreed they used multiple platforms such as Google Classroom, Emails, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter for teaching purposes. They agreed that there were challenges in deploying lectures especially for practical courses. One of the lecturers teaching a practical film and television course at MSU stated:

Students were vacated from campus and all learning activities had to be conducted online. Most students could not afford data bundles necessary for

the online learning. At the same time, there are practical courses that require the presence of students, and these are the worst affected

Lecturers from NUST shared similar sentiments on the mode of delivering lectures as online platforms such as Google Classroom, e-mail and WhatsApp were dominant. The lecturers said the platforms consumed less data. A lecturer who is responsible for a print journalism course added:

The biggest challenge was lecturing practical print courses. Students are supposed to visit places such as courts and other places for story writing. All that was not possible because of lockdown rules and the need to practice social distancing. Some students wanted to consult but they could not do so. COVID-19 grounded us.

Students learning practical courses in television and radio were mostly affected as they could not be physically present on campus to carry out lectures and practical sessions required for their modules. This ultimately meant learning the specific requirements and techniques of the course such as editing, writing for online, writing radio programmes could not be achieved or taught online. More so, a lecturer from MSU indicated that lectures could not be effectively delivered as some students did not have smart phones and data bundles to access them³. Supporting the difficulty of teaching practical broadcast courses, a lecturer from NUST said:

Teaching was to be done online. For practical courses coupled with this harsh economic environment, only a few were able to participate. Secondly, students needed to access the studio for editing and recording their programmes for both television and radio. Online learning couldn't replace such key a requirement for practical courses.

The sentiments expressed by the Zimbabwean lecturers show how, there was an attempt to domesticate ICT's fully to conduct lectures online. This could be conceptualised as the incorporation stage where ICTs are incorporated into the everyday routines of lectures a shift from the use of face-to-face lecturers (Chigona et al., 2010). However, the effectiveness of domesticating technologies fell short because institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe are poorly funded and are unable to support students with data bundles for them to fully partake in online learning. Even though the Zimbabwean Government identified digital technologies and ICTs as vital catalysts for educational and economic development, it was not followed effectively in implementing and establishing infrastructure to enable this to bear fruit; particularly during the pandemic era (TechZim, 2020). This saw a missed opportunity in ICT and digital technology development in higher and tertiary education learning.

³ Data bundles are packages for internet access.

Another lecturer at the MSU teaching a theoretical journalism course expressed pessimism about online learning in Zimbabwe. Although he used multiple platforms for learning purposes, he expressed that it was not as effective as the 'normal' face to face learning that students were used to. Students, he said, did not have access to proper digital technologies and data bundles, hence it was difficult to conduct lectures. Below are the excerpts of the interview:

I must say theoretical courses were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. I had to subscribe to various social media accounts such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Google Classroom. However, most students could not access these platforms because they did not have smartphones. Some were in rural areas where they did not have access to proper network. Only the few privileged could access these platforms as they had both smart-phones and data bundles to access the lectures I posted on these platforms. Online learning, however, is the way to go, but is still far from being achieved in Zimbabwe.

The lecturers' responses show the nature of the digital inequality in Zimbabwe that also affects students and Zimbabwean society (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed this inequality in journalism education. This view also tallies with Bordieu (1986) who is of the view that lower social class have little or no opportunity to acquire the traits, habits, or information necessary to accomplish a rise in status, income, class, or livelihood. Lecturers' experiences showed some of the inadequacies of online learning in face of the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe.

The COVID-19 pandemic was by far strenuous for journalism lecturers across the board. For some, it was a new way of doing things as they had to fully go online and conduct distance learning. This then required institutions to support academic staff psychologically and provide data bundles to deploy lectures effectively. Both lecturers teaching practical and theoretical courses from MSU expressed that they were supported by the university during the COVID-19 pandemic. Support came in the form of data bundles from cellular phone service provider, NetOne. However, one of the lecturers had this to say:

In an economy like Zimbabwe, challenges are also extended to network issues which hinders accessibility to be online. I would agree that the university supported us in terms of providing NetOne lines and data bundles, but the network was weak. I personally had to resort to using personal resources by switching to better networks such as TelOne service provider. Again, the service provider had network problems, although they were better compared to NetOne.

This then brings us to the challenges faced by these two lecturers. Both lecturers expressed how power cuts affected their day-to-day lecturing routines.

The lecturers acknowledged pessimism by students and the community at large who termed online learning as a way of obtaining ‘WhatsApp degrees’. Besides these issues, the lack of a robust online learning has thrown the idea of the ‘new normal’ a technologically driven way of learning enhanced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution into doubt. These sentiments were further expressed by a lecturer from NUST who emphasised that online learning was not effective:

Firstly, the practical side of the course was affected. Everything which students wanted for effective practical work was at school. Equipment for shooting and the editing suit cannot be taken home. While they can download some pirated software, their machines are not big enough to store the material. In some cases, they would have done their work in groups, but due to lockdown rules, students had to travel to their respective homes across the country. So practical work was not effective.

However, there were however glaring differences on the experiences of UJ lecturers. Unlike the Zimbabwean scenario, there was an attempt to replace face to face lectures with online driven learning. One of the lecturers teaching a theoretical course in journalism studies said the university had already anticipated scenarios that could result in lectures going online in the future. UJ, he said had already adopted online learning before the COVID-19 pandemic, although it was not as robust. Below are the excerpts of the interview:

The University of Johannesburg had long anticipated that one day we would go online. However, it was not as robust, and we still had contact classes. It is not necessarily by virtue of COVID-19 pandemic, but there were already plans to go fully online. Hence, we already were using platforms such as Blackboard for uploading lecture notes, course outlines and any other material related to the course. Looking at it closely, the university already had a head start because there were sessions on blackboard every semester.

In relation to challenges faced, the UJ lecturer expressed how he had to put in extra hours into lectures and consultations work, something he had not done in the normal face to face lectures. There were however more consultations via email, Zoom and WhatsApp as students had to learn doing things on their own. Regarding institutional support, he agreed that lecturers were supported by the university. This support came in the form of data, devices and constant departmental meetings to encourage and support lecturers psychologically. This shows how ‘Online learning is complementing and even replacing traditional face-to-face educational models at colleges and universities’ (Amber et al., 2017). In line with the domestication theory, this shows how the institution integrated new technologies to support and embed online learning in the curricula (Auster, 2016; Twig, 2003).

However, a Television studies lecturer at the same institution had a different view regarding teaching practical courses. He expressed pessimism towards online lectures:

We were new to online learning and honestly it did not work especially for practical oriented courses. Some students did not have devices and data was not sufficient for carrying out practical courses. It was difficult for students who could not access the studio, as we are used to face to face lectures. Some had to use cameras on their cellphones, instead of the proper television cameras.

The lecturer expressed lack of support from the institution and said at times, he had to use his own resources for lectures. In most instances, he said, students received their data late and it was difficult to conduct lectures.

However, like most universities in South Africa, the CPUT was also forced to migrate from contact to virtual teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, replacing it with online learning. To ensure classes continued through a remote platform, a lecturer teaching both practical and theoretical subjects expressed the following sentiments:

The institution made Blackboard collaborate available for teaching. To ensure lecturers were able to make a smooth transition, guidelines on delivery methods and seminars / training on new online learning were duly given by the institution. However, I had to use my personal data bundles to conduct classes and attend seminars.

Other than the challenges of internet access, the CPUT lecturers expressed challenges with migration from contact classes to virtual assisted teaching. Two of the interviewed lecturers, both for theoretical and practical subjects, said the following with regards to challenges:

Instead of classroom-based teaching, I moved to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While I found it helpful in the teaching of theoretical subjects, the practical components were heavily affected. Some of my teaching requires software and PC lab to do some activities. This challenge was further worsened by students' connectivity problems.

The other lecturer from the CPUT had this to say:

I had connectivity issues as an instructor and students faced the same predicaments. Some students do not know how to navigate around BB. Online tools are not efficient, such as submission links, which causes much anxiety for the instructor and especially the students. More should be done to improve the techno structures of the BB at this institution.

However, from the above sentiments, lecturers had challenges in teaching practical courses. Connectivity issues further hindered delivery of lectures.

Learning in an online environment: Student's perspectives and experiences

Zimbabwean students through national student body Zimbabwe National Students Union (Zinasu) contested the decision to migrate fully online at the courts of law. Some of their reasons for challenging the decisions to migrate online included the lack of ICT infrastructure, network coverage and bundles needed to access the internet (Chikandiwa, 2020). In line with this, Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) express how the digital divide has significantly affected the Global South, and journalism students in Zimbabwe are no exception. The digital divide continues to widen this gap with the continuous development of new information technologies, that then alienate other societies in the process (Van Dijk). Students faced challenges in this new normal type of scenario. As such, one fourth year student interviewed expressed concern on how the pandemic affected her studies. She indicated that there was no support from the institution, and learning had to stop:

It was a difficult period for me. COVID-19 caught us unaware, and we were forced to return home in February. I was meant to be done with my studies in June 2019, but I had to extend my studies. Dissertation consultations stopped because I could not afford data. Again, this is the time the telecoms industry hiked tariffs making the learning more difficult. Government promised to provide data for online classes, but that did not happen.

The fourth-year student further expressed that online learning was not as effective and delayed her completing her studies. Her sentiments render the domestication of technology ineffective and show the gap in accessibility of ICT's. The student attributed her delay in competing her degree to ICT illiteracy of some lecturers.

For some lecturers, this online learning did not work. Some of the lecturers could not conduct lectures via google classroom or WhatsApp because they could not use the technologies to communicate with students. We had to wait till June when the lockdown regulations where relaxed so that classes resume. Out of the five modules, only modules were learnt via these platforms. Still, it was a nightmare conducting lectures online. At the end of it all, I would not say that online learning was effective. Learning was very difficult, but I would not wholesomely discredit it because it was new. Out of a mark of 10, I would give online learning five marks.

Students further indicated that Zimbabwe's comatose economy and the need to learn from home affected their concentration and took them away from school. For the former, with inflation rates where high with most families finding it difficult to survive. As a result, data bundles for e-learning were beyond the

reach of many students. One of the students from NUST expressed how 'lessons became as preserve for the elite...The environment at home was not suitable and would never be suitable for online learning'. Another student said their courses are structured in such a way that they get industrial experience before they go for attachment. The outbreak of the pandemic, she argued, disturbed their course structure as they could not put to practice what they could have learnt. She explained:

I major in print journalism. Some of the course's demand that we write features stories, court stories and other community related stories. However, lockdown regulations grounded people as gatherings, visitations were not allowed. This resulted affected our learning. I am supposed to go for attachment but the knowledge I have is not the one which I am supposed to get or got. I hope to do better when I go for industrial attachment.

There was a stark difference with UJ Honors student, who felt that students were supported by the institution. One student interviewed said there was some confusion at first, but with time online learning was clear. From her opinion, they were already partially leaning online by virtue of platforms such as Blackboard. However, she expressed how online learning had some form of 'online fatigue' which sometimes discouraged her from learning and attending lectures.

There was a bit of confusion in the early days of this online learning. However, with time there was clear direction of online learning. We partially had already started doing online learning previously by virtue of platforms such as Blackboard. The institution provided data for us every month. The only problem was that there were slight delays in allocating data. The only problem with online learning is that you must put in extra effort when doing lectures, which results online fatigue or breaking down.

The students from Cape Peninsula University of Technology had mixed feelings with regards to migration from contact learning to virtual learning. A diploma in journalism student told the researchers the following:

Coronavirus has affected journalism students in a way that we were supposed to do some assessments that would make us to be able to survive in a newsroom and give us experience. For instance, we were supposed to do a current affair show and interview an expert on that show, but we are unable to because of the pandemic. In another assessment we were supposed to cover a live event, but we were unable to do so.

The response by the student shows how the structural challenges made learning during the coronavirus pandemic difficult. This migration to online learning was a challenge during the first days even though some significant changes were experienced weeks after virtual learning commenced.

Internship students: Challenges faced and experiences

The study sought to elicit views from students who had been placed or where yet to be placed on attachment for work experience in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Students from the UJ and the Midlands State University agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected their internship. In some instances, students had to stop internship completely. Some companies with journalism or communication related work were not accepting applications from students due to the pandemic. One of the students from the UJ stated that:

Directly or indirectly, my internship was affected. COVID-19 struck at a time we never expected it to. And again, this was a time when I was only getting to learn the hands-on job- that I must say was slightly different from what I learnt at the university. However, I had to rely on online meetings and assistance from senior colleagues at work who would help me edit my stories. It was a different experience from what we originally had in the office. Furthermore, it was difficult for a cub reporter like me to get stories during the pandemic, let alone source for information. In summary, it was a difficult experience for me.

The above outline shows how difficult it was for students recently placed on internship. Sourcing and writing news stories for ‘cub reporters’ was difficult and they had to rely on senior reporters who had work pressure. However, a student from the Midlands State University also expressed pessimism towards work related learning. The student felt the year had gone to waste as he could not be placed on attachment. He had this to say:

It was a difficult time for me and most of my colleagues had to be placed on attachment. Mostly companies with journalism-oriented work closed and were not taking students. It was more of a ‘wasted’ year as we were home doing nothing. This will potentially delay my graduation as well.

The structure of bachelor’s the degree programmes in Zimbabwe require that student go for industrial attachment when they are on their third year. However, the pandemic was also worst felt by different companies who couldn’t take interns due to lack of financial support.

Conclusion

This study found that the pandemic has reconfigured the way journalism is structured in southern Africa. Of importance to note is that journalism education and training in Africa is tailored made to ensure that students who go for industrial attachment, upon finishing their degree programmes, they quickly adjust and meet the needs of a given industry. This practice has been topical among various scholars who have been looking at ‘how journalism students should be prepared

to work in journalism in Africa' (Matsaathebe, 2011). While such a practice has been on going, the pandemic has restructured the practice which has resulted in some students failing to acquire work related learning. According to Banda et al. (2007), 'journalism education in Africa is on its way, but the road ahead is steep' but the testimony from educators and students, demonstrate that the road has even become steeper owing to various challenges. Other than the industrial attachment, this study also found that challenges with online learning affected journalism students and the effects were in line with deep seated structural challenges institutions and countries studied face. For example, journalism students in Zimbabwe faced more challenges in comparison to their South African counterparts. While lectures adjusted to new methods of teaching, this study also found that lectures had to acquire new skills even as they faced structural and macro challenges affecting their respective countries. The structural challenges faced by respective countries and institutions meant that in some institutions lecturers had to rely on their personal resources as they lacked institutional support.

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