

#Covid19 Must Fall#: A Review of Lecturers, Students and Administrators Experiences at the University of Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

#Must fall#. These words have become a common cliché in South Africa, when citizens and students take to the street to demonstrate a state of disgruntledness or unhappiness over an issue, as in #Fee Must Fall#. The aggrieved community will carry placards bearing the words e.g. #Covid 19 Must Fall#. This study assumes that many students, lecturers and administrators who have experienced the aftermath of Covid19 since 2020 might be inclined to express their frustrations through street demonstrations. Due to the uncertain future, the disgruntled higher education community is still holding their breath, although grumbling about the unprecedented shift to a rapid digital workplace and learning space. It is alleged that first year University students of 2020 with little or no computer knowledge were the most affected, living with an experience that would remain indelible on their minds. Using social research tools, namely questionnaires, informal and telephonic dialogue, sampled opinions 'cause and effects" on Covid 19 in the academic milieu. Using the University of Johannesburg-South Africa as a case study, this paper expresses personal experience accounts and argues that the journey into a perfect digital academic learning and teaching environment is still a long way ahead. The paper concludes that, there will be a missing gap in academic perfection and everyone or department should be tolerant of each other with time.

Keywords: Covid 19; Disgruntled; Digital; Cause and Effect

Introduction

Corona Virus (Covid 19) has left everyone with something to think of, to be remembered, to say and to be concerned. Whatever the rhetoric is, the experiences are not pleasant (Bhamani, et al. [1-3]). It is often adage that what befalls the earth, befalls the child of earth. If this is true, then one can argue that what has befallen earth is more than the children of earth (UNDP [4]). This is evident in the manner in which Covid 19 has shifted life styles, daily activities and affected every active person of working and schooling age (Amiri, et al. [4,5]). There are greater concerns in every aspect of life as fear, mistrust and suspicion has dominated the atmosphere. Questions without answers and even more questions without answers are been asked daily on televisions, Facebook and WhatsApp. Of these questions, everyone knows that Corona virus is a pandemic and has affected the world's socio-economic and political activities (Amiri, et al. [5]). Medical history has placed Covid 19 among pandemics that the world will remember (Qiu, et al. [6]). With responses from every direction, health experts are on the view that constant use of disinfectants

will have negative effect long after Covid 19 (Chen, et al. [7]). They further argue that, the use of disinfectants and prophylaxes, most of which are not certified or prescribe will even aggravate human effects (Peters, et al. [8]).

There are concerns if life will ever return to normal and some have predicted the new normal. Implying, life will never remain the same and whatever life throws at us, people will improvise (Javaid, et al. [9]). Covid 19 has provoked shifting life styles, changes in socioeconomic and political dimensions and concomitantly accelerated new learning and teaching tools. Create new academic environment and imposed the use of electronic devices. These changes were seen just after the outbreak of covid 19. The effect of this pandemic is massive and still to be quantify collectively. Individually, those in the academic field have a different story to tell. It is alleged that the unprecedented outbreak of Covid 19 affected everyone in the learning space and those severely affected were first year students of 2020, most of them from rural areas with little computer knowledge. This paper intends to sample opinions and personal experiences on how Covid 19 affected learning

and teaching in higher institutions. The paper will use the University of Johannesburg as a case study, to analyse the changes and recount personal experiences on administrators, lecturers and students. Emphasis will be on current second year students of 2021, who in first year in 2020 and how they were greeted into the university with a series of lockdowns, gradual phase lifting and an ultimate introduction into digital teaching and learning spaces (blackboard).

Conceptualization of Research

The consequences of Covid 19 cannot be quantified as yet. However, there are tangible evidences that can qualify the effects from the social, economic and political dimensions and in different magnitudes (Bakar, et al. [10,11]). Politicians were carried in the wave of this pandemic. No country can claim preparedness to the outbreak of the pandemic. Every state or country currently has one or more advisory committees. With some countries like South Africa having national, provincial, municipal and many sub advisory committees on Covid 19 (Medical Brief, n.d; Transparent International, [12,13]). A pertinent question to ask is, when they became Covid 19 experts. In a country already divided, this only adds to the political frustration and corruption at higher offices (Medical Brief, n.d; Transparent International, [12,13]). The political frustration is glaring in the economic sector with increasing human suffering, especially in the African continent. In South Africa, unemployment has risen to a historic level following a series of lockdown measures imposed (UNSA, et al. [14-16]). There is also noticeable increase in street vendors and homeless persons across the Central Business District (CBD) of Johannesburg after the lockdowns (Tenai & Mbewu, [17,18]). In attempt to alleviate the state of affairs, the government introduced a number of relief packages from pension to unemployment grants (RSA, Covid-19 info brief, n.d [19,20]). There were also food relief packages to the homeless. However, these measures were just temporary reliefs. With the phase-to-phase lifting of lockdown into affluent economic activities, the reality of the economic quagmire can be seen and qualified (Ranchhod, et al. [15,16]). All temporary relief measures are over.

In the social front, everyone witness the closure of schools, Universities, Higher institutions of learning, house of faith and churches, travel restrictions as preventive measures to the spread of Covid 19 (Mhlanga, et al. [21,22]). People were forced to wear mask, wash and sanitized their hands regularly. With all of these in place, it created a psychological dimension of fear and anxiety. Although there are no scientific evidence to assure that wearing a mask, constant washing and sanitizing of hands, closing gatherings including learning institutions and centres of worship has any preventive advantage (Egunjobi, et al. [23,24]). No one can say with exactitude how many learners or students had absconded from institutions as a result of the lengthy time spends at home (Anifowoshe, et al. [25]). The social dimension was the most affected, especially institute of higher learning and research. Higher institutes of learning such as Universities and research centres have a lot to think and write about.

It seems the pandemic has proven science wrong. Well known science lessons and evidence of Covid 19 were not on the same page (Stevens, et al. [26,27]). Advisory reports received from prominent scientist did not relate with written science texts in many regards. If this is true, then prominent science text books need a rewrite to incorporate evidence of Covid 19 (Fleming, et al. [27]). A major consequences of the advent of Covid 19, is the shift in learning practices from contact sessions, chalk and blackboard to unprecedented digital (Mhlanga, et al. [21,28]). There was no precise time, a month was assumedly sufficient to deal with the disease, suddenly a lot of time was spent at home. It has been argued that the time spent at home was sufficient to learn new skills and trade. Paradoxically, those with skills like reading, painting, music were tired sitting at home without any definite source of income or sustainability (UNSA, [14]).

Institutions were forced to pay labour without any services rendered. The University of Johannesburg suffered one or more of these effects, with student warranted to pay fee without learning. The University of Johannesburg students also had a share of these miseries. Administrators, Lecturers and Students were all in the soup, finding a way out. Contact sessions were virtually over and online learning was introduced. Although, online activities and learning wasn't new, but the advent of Covid 19 revolutionaries the practice (Menon, et al. [29]). New academic tools were introduced and some existing tools became absolute. For example, personal computers (PC) or desktops were left on the desks, while laptops and smart phones replaced office tools. Data became an essential ingredient of learning to the administrators, lecturers and students (Mhlanga, UNESCO [21,30]). This only adds to a new frustration to everyone in different magnitudes as data is never sufficient nor free. The administrators and lecturers were better equipped with online activities than the students and most especially first year students 2020. The University of Johannesburg management could not say with clarity, if every student had a laptop and has received a certain level of training before the outbreak of Covid 19.

Although, over time a certain amount of data were made available to students, that was not the case as student often ran out. Some of the data meant for studying was used for social interactions. Further still the University could not identify data used for school work and other activities. In a country already suffering from electricity blackout, data become essential as respiratory oxygen for life. The purpose of this paper is to sample personal opinions on how each person from the administration to the student at the University of Johannesburg felt the impact of covid 19 in the academic space. Using social research methodology and blinded analysis, the paper present its results using Microsoft excel® descriptive statistics. In which, it argued that not even the administrators were ready for the rapid shift from office based to home base instructions. The lecturers had similar experiences, but worst to the students. The paper concluded by making a request to all involved in research and higher learning institutions to acknowledge a gap in input and output over a certain period, if not most institutions will lose their old brains.

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