Impact of COVID-19 on Zimbabwe's state universities' education system. Case of Tourism and Hospitality Management Students

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ARTICLE HISTORY

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of Covid-19 in the early 2020 across the globe led to massive disturbances in the higher and tertiary education system. As a way of keeping pace with the needs of the key stakeholder *viz* students, institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe adopted online teaching and learning methodologies. This study examines the impact of Covid-19 on Zimbabwe's State Universities with special reference to tourism and hospitality students. A qualitative research design was used for the study. WhatsApp focus group and telephone interviews were also used to collect the data from the respondents. The findings revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected the education of most students at state universities. The adoption of online learning by state universities led to the production of 'half-baked' graduates since some of the modules needed adequate time for hands-on practice. Most of the respondents pointed out they had a negative attitude towards online learning as they faced financial challenges to purchase laptops, internet data bundles, failure to perform other tasks such as bed making, baking and cooking online, lack or poor internet infrastructure, inadequate training and retraining on the use of online applications. Some students lost momentum during the academic journey while others ended up dropping out of the university system and/or deferring their studies. Lack of detachment between students and universities was also reported. The study, therefore recommends the use of a hybrid learning for practical modules to achieve high-quality results and produce graduates that are relevant to the industry.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown, tourism and hospitality students, online learning, hybrid learning

1. Introduction

On a global scale, the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic since the start of 2020 has impacted the education system in different ways. The Higher and Tertiary Education System (HTES) is not an exception, it has been impacted profoundly (UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and The Caribbean [IESALC], 2020). The HTES has a traditional way of doing education business around the globe.

It has for long been based on a traditional face-to-face mode of teaching and learning (Aborode et al., 2020), where students, and facilitators, would congregate in a lecture room for knowledge delivery and sharing.

This traditional education system has been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic (Azorín, 2020; Stukalo & Simakhova, 2020) as most universities around the world closed their premises while countries shut down their borders to the public in response to lockdown measures (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). In light of the Covid-19 pandemic concern, several universities around the world either cancelled or postponed most campus events such as conduction of workshops, conferences, face-to-face teaching, and learning (Sahu, 2020).

In the context of Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education system, the negative wave of the Covid-19 was also felt from March 2020, when the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) imposed a series of lockdowns measures (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, 2020) to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the term 'lockdown' became an international buzzword. Broadly, a lockdown is a state of an emergency protocol implemented by the state or central authorities "to restrict people to leave their residences resulting in mass quarantines and staying at home" (Mishra, Gupta & Shree, 2020 p.1). Zimbabwe state universities were closed for face-to-face tuition by 29 March 2020 in line with lockdown provisions (Chida, 2020). Face-to-face lectures had barely started, with students having covered only two weeks of tuition on campus at most universities. The state universities were obliged to continue with their education services during the lockdown period while their premises were closed (Tsekea & Chigwada, 2020). This meant that universities were to embark on a 'new normal' that included various strategies to continue learning and research. Electronic learning (e-learning) was opted for by learning institutions (Nganga, Waru & Nakwevaru, 2020) as the best option to continue

rendering their services to their main stakeholders namely undergraduate and post-graduate students.

Electronic learning (e-learning) is the transfer of knowledge and education by utilising various electronic devices (Koohang & Harman, 2005). The adoption of e-learning was not voluntary but was born out of necessity after the realisation that it was no longer possible to continue with physical face-to-face learning (Azorín, 2020). The e-learning platform provided the feeling of psychological safety to the learning community during the Covid-19 troubling period (Mishra et al., 2020). Despite this advantage, most Zimbabwe state universities were not prepared for the e-learning method thereby creating a lot of anxieties for learners, administrators and faculty members related to the need to adjust to new settings.

However, amidst the chaos, Azorín (2020) regards the Covid-19 crisis as a golden opportunity to re-think outside the box and come up with new improved higher education systems that meet the attendant needs of the present and future settings. The Covid-19 pandemic could also act as a vital catalyst (Azorín, 2020; IESALC, 2020) for innovation, transformation, and reform of the university education system (Kabadayi, O'Connor & Tuzovic, 2020).

By many accounts, the traditional classroom face-to-face model of knowledge delivery and dissemination has been made obsolete in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis given the lockdowns (Aborode et al., 2020), social distancing rules as well as the risks associated with crowds (Baum & Hai, 2020). To remedy the situation, online learning has become a 'new normal' in many universities around the world despite the initial discomfort, resistance, and disconnect (Izumi, Sukhwani, Surjan, & Shaw, 2020). It is against this background that there be an investigation into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the universities' education system with a particular reference to the tourism and hospitality students in Zimbabwe. This is because for tourism and hospitality education, for instance, involves a largely practical approach that ordinarily would require face-to-face tuition for effective delivery and learning. There is also a need for the Zimbabwean tourism and hospitality training institutions to be relevant as such come up with strategies for effective practical learning environments during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the current study explores perceptions towards online education, barriers to online education and the impact of

Covid-19 pandemic on the universities education system with a particular focus on tourism and hospitality students.

2. Covid-19 pandemic and the higher and tertiary education system

The novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has disrupted the long-established and traditional education system worldwide which is anchored on face-to-face teaching and learning (IESALC, 2020; Stukalo & Simakhova, 2020). To contain the Covid-19 pandemic, governments the world over implemented lockdowns; that is, citizens were ordered to stay at home, schools, colleges, and universities were closed in March 2020, particularly in Zimbabwe (Mukeredzi, 2020). This threw the education system into serious disarray as many education calendars were either halted and/or disrupted due to Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic halted the traditional mode of teaching and learning through lockdowns by restricting both students and facilitators to their homes (Azorín, 2020; Baum, Mooney, Robinson & Solnet, 2020). As a result, worldwide, millions of students found themselves spending unusually long periods at home (Izumi et al., 2020).

Before the advent of covid-19 pandemic, online learning or virtual learning implementation and adoption had been lagging not only because of lack of resources but due to half-hearted commitment as well as resistance to change by the higher education systems (Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, & Wang, 2020; Stukalo & Simakhova, 2020). This is despite the fact that technological developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT) had over the years made online learning relatively easier and convenient to adopt in higher education. Covid-19, thus, thrusted upon higher education institutions an urgent and emergent situation that needs immediate attention in the form of online teaching and learning to discharge their mandate amidst the Covid-19 crisis.

The higher education system had to quickly, and sometimes clumsily, adapt to survive and ultimately thrive (IESALC, 2020; Izumi et al., 2020). Covid-19 pandemic had seriously forced higher education institutions to think outside the box because "the educational journey of the previous decades has come to an end" (Azorín, 2020 p.1). As earlier intimated, Covid-19 has disrupted the face-to-face education system that was largely obsolete in the face of an ever-changing world (Azorín, 2020; Izumi et al., 2020). It heralded an opportunity

of redesigning a better education system which is in tandem with challenging present realities. From the student's needs perspective, a new education system should be anchored on equity, excellence, and student well-being (Izumi et al., 2020). The need for a change in the higher education system to make it more relevant and current-future needs-driven is a present debate that has been intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic (IESALC, 2020). As a result, Covid-19 pandemic's unprecedented impact on the education system has created a situation where the "education world is being forced to set about the evolution of vast dimensions" (Azorín, 2020 p.2), such that it can move away from the direct face-to-face instruction and memorisation to more engaging, critical, deep and interactive learning which seeks to address challenges of the present-day innovation-driven economy.

Azorín (2020), therefore, calls for a reconfiguration of educational institutions including universities to make them better able to adapt to the challenging Covid-19 imposed times. The reconfiguration, the change, and the paradigm shift in education cannot happen on their own, but it demands that higher education institutions take an active role in the realization of this revolution thrust upon the education system by the Covid-19 pandemic (Azorín, 2020; IESALC, 2020).

3. New education realities imposed by Covid-19 pandemic

The traditional education system, which is predominantly classroom-based, face-to-face group physical learning, and teaching, was made redundant by Covid-19 pandemic (Izumi et al., 2020; Azorín, 2020). More than 160 countries across the world, including Zimbabwe, ordered all educational institutions to temporarily close leaving at least 1.6 billion students out of school (World Bank Education 2020 in Azorín, 2020; IESALC, 2020; Sahu, 2020) as a preventive measure to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, higher education institutions in Zimbabwe, notably Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences (located in Mutare), Chinhoyi University of Technology (located in Chinhoyi), Lupane State University (located in Lupane), Midlands State University (located in Gweru) and Great Zimbabwe University (located in Masvingo), among others, turned to remote online learning to cope with the pandemic.

Some state universities employed online educational platforms like Google Classroom, The Big Blue Button and other video conferencing applications that

were downloaded without any cost and were easy to use. Higher and tertiary education students were physically restricted at home and other premises were no-go areas for the learners due to the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic caught the education institutions unawares and forced them to switch to e-learning to maintain tuition delivery to students at home (Azorín, 2020; IESALC, 2020). The main goal behind adopting remote learning was to ensure that Covid-19 "has the least possible impact on people's lives" (Azorín, 2020 p.4) including students since education is a basic human right. Therefore, there is a need to highlight the pros and cons of online learning across the globe.

Online learning comes with many advantages, among them convenient learning as students get tuition and instruction in the comfort of their homes (IESALC, 2020; Izumi et al., 2020). The convenience to students is enormous as e-learning materials are self-paced and accessible all the time. Students have an opportunity to download and save learning materials for future use at times convenient to them. Additionally, online learning is more cost-efficient (Strivastava, 2018) for students and the universities given that once it is set up, the materials can be used for many sessions. Online learning is cheaper for students (Stukalo & Simakhova, 2020) in that they do the learning while at home thus eliminating costs towards accommodation, food, and transport associated with being on universities' campuses for face-to-face tuition. From the facilitators' side, one can teach a large group of students than one would ordinarily do with face-to-face teaching.

In a bid to facilitate continuity of learning, Mugiraneza (2021) reported that the Republic of Rwanda partnered with Airtel and MTN internet service providers. This enabled free access to education content by three higher learning institutions namely the University of Rwanda, Rwanda Polytechnic and Rwanda Education Board. In addition, South African and Tunisian universities also partnered with internet providers and governments to overcome this critical challenge by negotiating zero-rated access to specific educational and information websites. Other Universities such as Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa are offering data bundles to their students and staff as a way to mitigate obstacles that may derail efforts to commence online teaching and learning (Tamrat & Teferra, 2020). The strategy might make it easy for both students and the facilitators to work online to learn smoothly without any drawbacks.

Furthermore, online learning is flexible and provides 24-hour access to learning material for students and the material can be accessed in several formats such as Word, Portable Document File (PDF), audio, pictures, and videos. Online

learning provides students with an opportunity to repeatedly learn material until they fully comprehend and understand it (Kimiloglu, Ozturan, & Kutlu, 2017). More so, the video and audio materials used in e-learning platforms make the whole learning process more fun and interesting thus increasing understanding and retention of material (Izumi et al., 2020).

However, online learning has its drawbacks. One of the key demerits of online learning is the high cost of initial set up associated with buying equipment like computers, software, internet equipment, the training of facilitators and students (Strivastava, 2018). More so, poor internet infrastructure, lack of electrical power, and lack of computers are obstacles to effective online learning in most developing countries (Okocha, 2020). Within the Zimbabwean context, this is made worse by the fact that most students reside in rural areas where internet connectivity is very poor and, in some cases, non-existent (Matikiti, Mpinganjira, & Roberts-Lombard, 2017).

Online learning may also entrench inequalities among students, especially students living with disabilities who may be left behind because commonly, most online platforms are not designed with disabled students in mind; the visually impaired may not be able to cope with online learning demands (Strivastava, 2018). Moreover, online learning may not be as effective with practical subjects as those in tourism and hospitality which require physical face-to-face interaction.

Furthermore, online learning leads to social isolation as lack of classroom interaction with classmates might not be good for the overall cognitive development of students (Ncube, Dube & Ngulube, 2014). Therefore, this study sought to assess the impact of Covid-19 on state universities' tourism and hospitality management education in Zimbabwe, highlighting the challenges faced during online learning as well as revealing students' attitudes towards the new normal online learning.

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. A WhatsApp focus group discussion was conducted with 128 Tourism and Hospitality students from five state universities in Zimbabwe to solicit their responses on higher education

amidst Covid-19 pandemic. The methods were considered as the most convenient and cost-effective ways of getting information for the study during the lockdown period when students were taking their lectures from home via an online mode of teaching and learning. The study was carried out between March and July 2021.

The collected data was thematically analysed and the themes were supported with the sentiments from the respondents. Data was thematically analysed following Creswell and Creswell's (2018) steps of analysing qualitative data. Step one involved organising and preparing the data including listening to audio recordings and transcription of the focus group discussion. The second step involved reading all the data repeatedly to get the overall meaning before analysing it. Step four involved coding the data and organising it into categories of text by the researcher and the codes were grouped to form broader themes. Lastly, data interpretation was done and findings were presented in detailed narrations following the dominant themes. Pseudo names were used for the interviewees instead of their real names in the study when reporting findings. The next section presents the results and discussion.

5. Results and discussion

The following section discusses results against the following themes; students' perceptions towards online education, barriers to online education and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the universities education system with a particular focus on tourism and hospitality students. Tourism and hospitality students were selected from other university disciplines as they required both soft and hard skills to work in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Students' perceptions towards online education

The respondents were asked to highlight what their opinions were regarding their online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the students were sceptical towards online learning. There was general resistance to online education with students citing lack of meaningful support from relevant state universities. Of the respondents, 83.1% cited that they were more concerned about the practical modules they might lose out on due to the lack of physical face-to-face demonstrations by lecturers. This was supported by one of the respondents who argued that:

> *Most of the hospitality modules such as Rooms Division Management, Food and Beverage preparation and Food and Beverage service require practical demonstration and hands-on training* (Telephonic interview with Chiedza1, 6 June 2021).

Respondents emphasised that it was difficult for them to get adequate tutorship of these modules via online learning platforms. Regarding practical modules, students demanded that they be allowed to have practical learning at the respective institutions.

In an interview with another student, it was revealed that:

> Sir, how can I learn to prepare different dishes online, to make bed online, how can I do it, I feel practical need face-to-face interaction with our lecturers. Yes, videos are available but physical interaction remains critical to modules with practical components (Telephonic interview with Tinashe2, 12 June 2021).

Consistent with the above finding, Azorín (2020) recommends the adoption of hybrid learning to cater for practical-based courses. Hybrid learning is a bimodal education program that involves both virtual and face-to-face learning to cater for learner needs as well as curriculum demands. From this argument, it means that e-learning is limited to certain disciplines such as humanities and social sciences which focus on developing theoretical skills rather than practical skills. Disciplines such as tourism and hospitality, medicine as well as engineering, among others, need more hands-on skills, as such the need for hybrid learning as the method serves as an excellent alternative to online learning.

More so, some students were against the idea of online learning altogether since they pointed out that it was not good for lecturers to post videos showing cooking and baking (for tourism and hospitality studies) method on their online platforms. One of the respondents pointed out that:

> It was not prudent to post videos of different dishes online because most of us cannot afford to buy the ingredients needed to prepare those certain dishes at home. Another challenge is that most of us stay in rural areas where we are not using electrical gadgets for cooking and baking. However, at the university, we take advantage of the practical fee that we pay, and the university purchases the commodities in bulky and we also make use of the university equipment to do our practical lessons (Telephonic interview with Joshua3, 28 June 2021).

This means that students prefer to undertake their practical lessons at the institution using university facilities for their education for quality results. In addition, due to extended periods of lockdown in the country, some of the students lost their learning momentum as their study routines and willingness were disrupted. The successive lockdowns implemented in the country have led

some students to drop out of the university to pursue work opportunities that arose during the lockdown period. This was, for example, raised by Tourism and Hospitality students who averred that:

> The lockdown measures imposed by our government have led to some of my colleagues to drop out. When I started my degree, we were 90 in class, but right now we are 76. Where are my colleagues right now? Others have left for job opportunities, staying at home as well as deferring their studies (Telephonic interview with Sikhulekhile4, 15 June 2021).

Some of the respondents have developed a negative attitude towards schooling such that even if universities were to reopen, some of the students may not return to colleges.

Over and above the foregoing, some of the students, 66.2%, were disgruntled over the lack of networking with other students. Students were dissatisfied with online learning. This dissatisfaction by students was attributed to lack of support from the university, the high cost of internet bundles and resistance to change as well as lack of a conducive learning environment at home. Azorín (2020) argues that home learning environments may not be conducive for online learning, thus, affecting effectiveness and efficiency. There is a growing sense of detachment between students and their institutions as students are slowly losing that sense of belonging usually associated with physically being at the university regularly.

More so, some of the respondents pointed out that they had a negative attitude towards online learning as a result of a lack of self-motivation among them. Of the respondents, 80.4% pointed out that learning using the traditional lecture room set-up was better as facilitators could encourage students to network with other peers during group discussions and presentations as well as adhering to strict schedules to avoid the falling off track of students during their studies. The strategy motivates students to work harder, unlike a situation where one would be working online alone at home. Face-to-face learning provides an opportunity to connect with friends, solve problems and network with other students from a wide range of different backgrounds. During classroom lectures, one can request more information and get a richer understanding through the facilitator and other students' body language as well as voice, unlike using online platforms.

In addition, the tourism and hospitality curriculum was developed aimed at developing students with communication and practical skills in various modules. There is a lack of communication skills development using online

platforms which best taught using face-to-face models. For tourism and hospitality training, students have to interact with guests given that their environment within which they will operate from largely regards interpersonal contact with human touch aspect. In this regard, communication skills are an integral requirement wherein during lectures, role plays, individual and group presentations become essential learning tools.

On the other hand, other respondents (34.5%) were positive about online learning. This was cemented by a student who asserted that:

> To me, online learning is less costly since there are no accommodation, food and travel costs involved to visit university campuses (Telephonic interview with Tafadzwa5, 25 June 2021).

Some students thought it was cheaper and convenient to do their work while they were at home. It was reported that parents of the concerned students were no longer budgeting accommodation, food, and transport bills for their children. The findings concur with Krakoff's (2021) report that online learning was considered a more affordable option because the transport costs and other additional costs are eliminated when online learning is used as an option.

6. Barriers to online education

Tourism and hospitality students complained about several issues that were hindering them from fully participating in online learning platforms especially Google classroom, Office 365 as well as Moodle. These are some of the platforms some of the Zimbabwean state universities adopted for their e-learning purposes. All of the respondents cited lack of support from their universities in the form of internet data bundles at the very least.

The students had the opinion that since they had paid their tuition fees for the semester, the expectation from students was that the universities would assist or facilitate access to internet data bundles to enable them to participate in online learning through Zoom, Webinar, Googlemeet or Skype. This was supported by one of the students who opined that:

> How come? I paid all the fees but the University is not helping me with internet bundles to compensate for the suspended face-to-face lectures. It's grossly unfair. What are they using the fees for since students are at home? (Telephonic interview with Jackson6, 26 June 2021).

This implies that in the opinion of students it was more of a 'double loss' to students who had to pay tuition as well as foot their own bills for the internet

data bundles in order to access internet-based platforms such as the Google classroom.

Further, the study participants also cited lack of support with devices such as laptops or smartphones to enable them to meaningfully participate in the online platforms. The switching-on to online teaching, particularly Google classroom or Moodle by certain universities was done without adequate preparation such that some of the students who had no laptops or mobile smartphone devices were left out as they could not acquire the equipment with immediate effect. This was complemented by one of the students who said:

> Though it is an expectation during this 21st Century that I should have a laptop as a university student, I do not have one because of my background, my parents struggle each time to raise the tuition fees. Every semester, I had to have a tuition fee payment plan with the respective office so that I would not be chased out of the university premises. When I am at the university, I normally rely on the university's computer laboratory for my academic work that requires computers (Telephonic interview with Christopher7, 28 June 2021).

This means that students without the requisite gadgets such as laptops were left out when online teaching and learning were introduced by the state universities. This finding is consistent with that of Stukalo and Simakhova (2020) who established that not all university students have computers and smartphones to participate in online learning. However, laptops and smartphones are now a prerequisite for students to fully participate in online learning activities such as Zoom, Google meet, Webinar or Skype yet the majority of students do not have these gadgets late alone financial resources to acquire the gadgets (Gon & Rawekar, 2017). This implies that the net result of this is that access to education would only be restricted to those students with appropriate devices to enable effective learning (Huang et al., 2020; IESALC, 2020).

As a result of the digital divide, the gap between the upper-middle, lower-middle, and low-income countries is likely to keep on widening. This also means the knowledge gap between students from different income backgrounds also widens. In other words, students who come from the elite classes theoretically progress well with their university education while those from poor economic backgrounds are left out in the academic race.

Furthermore, students complained about the high cost of internet data bundles required for virtual online learning. One of the students averred that:

Internet data bundle is too expensive. I cannot afford the cost…worse still, the University is not supporting us with the bundles, yet I paid all the fees. Other lecturers are using WhatsApp to send their work to us but still, we need data bundles to download the information (Telephonic interview with Shylet8, 27 June 2021).

Students have the opinion that their universities must also support them with internet airtime (data bundles) during their online learning. This might ease the way of learning online.

Another challenge raised by the majority of the respondents (95.9%) was poor internet connectivity, internet coverage or intermittent internet connectivity in most parts of the country. Zimbabwe as a developing country has a major challenge to effectively implementation online-based learning. A considerable number of university students at various institutions reside in rural or remote parts of the country. This was echoed by one student who said:

Most of us live in rural areas where internet is not available, and even mobile phone network is both very poor and unavailable; so, we cannot participate in Google classroom, Zoom, Google meet, Moodle or WhatsApp groups (Telephonic interview with Kennedy9, 29 June 2021).

Internet connectivity proved to be a major barrier even to students who reside in towns and cities due to its poor strength and unreliability. One of the respondents added that:

Yes, I reside in town but internet access here is bad, you know it's weak such that one struggles to connect to google classroom to get module material or to download recorded material by lectures on YouTube. It took several minutes to connect as well as downloading the sent material. Sometimes it can disconnect in the middle of downloading some material from lecturers. You spend several hours doing one thing. What a pity to us! It needs someone with patience and self-determination" (Telephonic interview with Elsie10, 30 June 2021).

These findings are consistent with the study by IESALC (2020) and Stukalo and Simakhova (2020) in which poor internet infrastructure was found to be a major obstacle to effective implementation of online learning. This also explains what Tamrat and Teferra (2020) found and postulated that in Africa going online is not simple because only 24% of the population can access the internet and that there is generally poor connectivity, exorbitant data costs and frequent power interruptions are also severe obstacles. This implies that the disruptions posed on the university's education system forced some of the students to defer their studies because of the challenges they face.

Another challenge was the lack of training for the students to use online platforms during their learning, considering that it was their first time working online. In addition, some of them were not able to use digital libraries. They were not able to access online academic material through e-books, institutional repositories, and e-journals.

The universities' library guidelines were not updated. Of the respondents, 31.1% highlighted that passwords required to access recommended e-journals were not availed to them in some cases. This made it difficult for the students to search for academic material for use in preparing assignments as well as dissertation writing, thereby producing work of a poor standard. In a way, it also affected research and innovation considered to be key pillars in the higher education system.

Another challenge affecting the learning of students is lack of preparedness for both students and facilitators. The lack of preparedness to adopt online learning by universities was a major challenge affecting the learning progress. This was supported by one of the respondents who said:

> *The disruption of normal face-to-face learning in my country due to Covid-19 pandemic led universities to adopt online learning but there was lack of preparedness on our side as well as lecturers. We were caught unaware, but education was to continue….* (Telephonic interview with Justice11, 29 June 2021).

Within the Zimbabwean context, students are not skilled enough on how to use the chosen e-learning tools for online lectures as well as access e-resources considering that for most it is their first time to use online learning. On another note, students are not adequately equipped with computers or laptops and the required internet data for online remote learning. In order to deal with the challenges, especially to those undertaking practical-based studies end up deferring certain practical modules to a later period that may be conducive to them.

Commenting on the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and hospitality education, respondents pointed out that the Covid-19 pandemic had negatively impacted the outcomes of their degree programme. One of the students averred that:

> *The advent of Covid-19 brought about adverse effects on the practical modules, especially in our discipline when compared to the humanities discipline for example. The university has partially*

suspended practicals at the time we were learning other theoretical-based modules online. When the government relaxed some of the lockdown measures sometime in October to December last year (2020). This was the time institutions of higher learning scheduled face-to-face examinations. This was also the time when we were instructed by our lecturers to come and do our practical subjects in one to two weeks. This was not fair as the facilitators were forced to deliver the lectures within a limited time. This imposed too much pressure on us as we were used to doing our practical for thirteen weeks per semester (Telephonic interview with Martha12, 30 June 2021).

In the end, it appeared that most state universities were operating crash programmes to fulfil the requirements of completing the examination process since it was a combination of continuous assessment and examination writing. Potentially, this implied that universities were now producing 'half-baked' students because of the Covid-19 crisis they were facing. Practical-based modules need adequate time for students to effectively follow the demonstrations by facilitators. For example, in the practical cooking modules, learners need to follow step-by-step different procedures for various dishes they prepare without rushing. This, overall, helps to improve the mastery of the skills of tourism and hospitality students as they follow demonstrations from their lecturers.

7. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the long-established and venerated education system of mainly face-to-face learning and teaching. There is a pressing need for the higher education system to adjust to the realities brought by Covid-19 pandemic and embrace all the necessary changes in response to the crisis.

Covid-19 is a golden opportunity for universities in Zimbabwe, and beyond, to focus on what matters most in education. The study concludes that online learning was not an effective tool for learning practical modules or subjects in Zimbabwean state universities. Students faced various challenges which included the high cost of internet data bundles, lack of devices such as laptops and smartphones, lack of training, unavailable support from universities, lack of self-motivation and lack of suitable facilities at home for practical learning. Furthermore, the study revealed that state universities are not adequately prepared for online teaching and learning, hence, the continued deferment of teaching practical modules. Therefore, it was deduced that institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe have to implement hybrid learning for tourism and hospitality students. Hybrid learning comprises virtual learning for

theory related modules. The physical learning mode can effectively be implemented while observing all the Covid-19 preventive measures such as social distancing, hand-washing, hand sanitisation, wearing of face masks, regular testing and screening as well as fumigation of the kitchen laboratories as well as demonstration guest rooms.

8. Recommendations

- Students should accept the new normal of online education such that they can be able to participate effectively and efficiently. Students need to accept training on online platforms such as Google classroom or Moodle as well as on how to use online libraries and databases to be active participants and beneficiaries of online learning.

  Recommendations to Zimbabwean State Universities

- Zimbabwe's state universities should strive to provide meaningful and adequate support to both students and facilitators in the form of several handouts such as internet data bundles and devices such as laptops or tablets. The strategy might make it easy for both students and the facilitators to work online learning smoothly without any drawbacks. This can be supported by comprehensive training and retraining to students on how to use the online learning platforms, that is, the Google classroom, Google meet and Zoom, and the Moodle platforms among others.

- For practical modules, universities should adopt hybrid learning to develop both theoretical and practical skills for the students. The Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE) must also intervene and encourage all state universities to complete a certain percentage, for instance 25%, of the curriculum through online teaching and almost 75% using face-to-face interaction since both students and universities' lecturers are faced with a lot of challenges.

- During their face-to-face lectures in their kitchen laboratories, there is need to adhere to Covid-19 health and safety guidelines and universities should provide kitchen laboratories to reduce congesting students during their lecture times. In the presence of Covid-19 pandemic, universities must reconsider reducing the number of students enrolled in practical-based modules. This helps students maintain social distance when undertaking practicals in the kitchen laboratories.

- In addition, public-private partnerships between the university and private companies such as Econet, NetOne or Telecel to make online learning effective and successful, especially in developing countries like

Zimbabwe. This is critical given the reality that Covid-19 caught everyone by surprise bringing unanticipated consequences to the education system. Governments must invest in internet infrastructure covering every part of the nation to enable education institutions to be connected. Working partnerships involving the education, health, community, and many other stakeholders including the business community are required to make e-learning work during and after Covid-19 pandemic.

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