

Lecturers' Perceptions of Blended Teaching in the Post COVID-19 Era: A Case Study of a University in Lesotho

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Abstract: *The study reports on implementing blended learning and teaching in the post COVID-19 era at a University in Lesotho. Research indicates that COVID-19 has necessitated the adoption of blended teaching and learning across the entire education domain. This suggests that traditional face-to-face teaching approaches were no longer appropriate due to the restrictions imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus. Therefore, online teaching and learning became the only way lecturers in higher education, most especially in the selected University, could engage with their students. Therefore, the study sought to explore the implementation of blended teaching and learning in post COVID-19 at University in Lesotho. An interpretive paradigm was adopted in this study using a qualitative approach confined within a case study, and face-to-face interviews with lecturers (n=20) were used for data collection. Latent thematic analysis was the method used for analysing the emerging themes. Findings from interviews with lecturers reveal that blended teaching and learning is essential because it fosters learner-centredness through*

access to a plethora of electronic resources in several digital archives. Thus, the study recommends that blended teaching and learning should be adopted as a strategy for teaching and learning in Lesotho Universities.

Keywords: Blended teaching, COVID-19, Technology, teaching approaches, learner centredness.

1. Introduction

Owing to its ravaging nature and incessant spread across the globe, the coronavirus (COVID-19) has necessitated the implementation of digital learning across the entire education spectrum. Since its unprecedented outbreak in 2019 in China, the pandemic has had a disturbing impact on socio-economic growth across the globe. Its remarkable influence has also been negatively felt in education, where schools and universities were shut down to avoid further spread. According to UNICEF (2021), "schools with more than 168 million students globally have been completely closed for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns." This means that a significant amount of teaching time was lost, and it may not be easy to recover soon. Therefore, the pandemic necessitated implementing blended teaching and learning across the entire higher education spectrum in Lesotho (Makafane & Chere-Masupha, 2021). This suggests that lecturers had to shift away from traditional face-to-face teaching methods to technology-appraised methods such as Google classrooms, Zoom meetings, Google meet and Microsoft teams to expedite teaching and learning (Toquero, 2020; Alasoluyi, 2021).

The study thus sought to explore the lecturers' perceptions in relation to blended teaching imposed by the pandemic. This is because the higher education policy in Lesotho stipulates that blended learning should form the basis of programme delivery in higher learning institutions (Council on

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Higher Education (CHE), 2013). The researchers, therefore, believe that COVID-19, as bad as it is, brought a positive change towards implementing blended teaching and learning in higher institutions (Asarta & Schmidt, 2020; Eom, 2021). This is because the World Health Organisation (WHO) and world governments had to impose stringent methods aimed at curbing the spread of the virus, such as social distancing, which prohibited physical contact in the classroom (Megahed & Ghoneim, 2022; Karakose, 2021; Alshammari et al., 2020; Wargo, 2020). This implies that classes had to be held online (Cruz et al., 2022). However, few studies have been conducted in Lesotho on the use of technology in the classroom during the pandemic, but none of them explored the use of blended teaching and learning in the post COVID-19 era. For instance, Mokenela's (2019) study conducted at the National University of Lesotho', explored how blended learning can be implemented and the challenges facing such implementation at the National University of Lesotho. However, lecturers' perceptions on the implementation of blended learning regarding both traditional and online learning were not sought. Furthermore, another study by Makafane and Chere-Masopha (2020) mainly focused on the online learning challenges that students experienced and the causes of those challenges. The current study thus sought to fill these gaps by exploring lecturers' perception about the implementation of blended teaching and learning in the post-pandemic era, and how it can expedite teaching and learning.

Therefore, this study explores the implementation of blended teaching and learning as well lecturers' perceptions on the use of this new teaching method in the post COVID-19 era. This is because most higher learning institutions seem to rely more on traditional teaching approaches with limited technology in Lesotho.

1.2 Research Questions

To respond to the purpose of the study, we sought to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the lecturers' perceptions towards the implementation of blended teaching and learning in post COVID-19?
- RQ2: What challenges do lecturers encounter in implementing blended teaching and learning after COVID-19?

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Replacement–Amplification–Transformation (RAT) model developed by Hughes et al. (2006). The model emphasises the integration of technology in education (Kimmons et al., 2020). This simply suggests that technology should play an integral part in the expedition of knowledge in higher education. The model has three principles: technology as a replacement, technology as amplification and technology as transformation (Hughes et al., 2006). Regarding the first principle, technology as a replacement in the context of this study means that technology neither changes the appearance of the learning practice nor affects teaching or learning practice and behaviour, but it increases access (Kimmons et al., 2020). Replacement in RAT is when the lecturers' instruction and students' way of thinking is unchanged, but they are mainly replaced by digital devices (Jimola & Ofodu, 2021). For example, textbooks and worksheets are replaced with computers or online instead of behind desks. In the class, students can focus on what is being taught and then access the notes and other material online. Replacement, in this case, emphasises that the teaching methods used prior COVID-19 were replaced with the implementation of blended teaching and learning. This suggests that lecturers and students can continue with the academic journey during an emergency or any emergence of a natural disaster without physical contact. Furthermore, it should be understood that by replacing traditional teaching approaches with the blended teaching-learning approach, we do not imply that old approaches are no longer needed, but they are used besides blended learning to make teaching and learning to be more appealing.

The second principle, technology amplification, implies that technology increases efficiency, effectiveness and production in higher learning institutions (Hughes et al., 2006). This encourages self-paced learning because students can readily find and retrieve information online to beef up their knowledge if they missed some points or part of the content under the common or traditional learning method. Blended teaching and learning as a newly implemented method, therefore, broaden the capability of both lecturers and students because the technology usage intensifies the students' learning process by expanding lecturers-students' interaction and knowledge exchange with each other without necessarily meeting face-to-face (Megahed & Ghoneim, 2022). Peimani and Kamalipour (2021) further substantiate that blended learning increases students' interest in learning.

The last principle is technology as transformation (Hughes et al., 2006). This includes activities that could not be done without using technology. This is facilitated by engaging platforms such as Zoom, Google meets, Microsoft teams and Skype, to mention but a few (Faustino & Kaur, 2021; Madlela, 2022). Technology is definitely transforming classrooms, especially when students and lecturers cannot physically meet and opt for online classes (Karakose, 2021). Our synthesis is, therefore, that when classes are transformed with technology, students' interest increases, and they will thus learn a lot of what is expected of them as this engages them in deeper learning.

Given the abovementioned principles, we believe that technology is integral to today's teaching and learning. This, therefore, suggests that institutions of higher learning ought to adopt blended learning as it expedites learning and also fosters learner-centredness (Moreno & Mayer, 1999; Karakose, 2021; Madlela, 2022; Van der Merwe & Pedro, 2022). This adoption of blended learning by high institutions of learning is enshrined in the Lesotho Higher Education Policy (CHE, 2013) as the new form of teaching that tertiary institutions are expected to adopt. Furthermore, COVID-19 has somewhat necessitated a new dawn in teaching and learning because most, if not all, higher education institutions had to implement online teaching and learning (Megahed & Ghoneim, 2022; Karakose, 2021; Makafane & Chere-Masupha, 2021). We further believe that what was a good practice during the pandemic in terms of teaching and learning is now a new norm. This study thus sought to find out whether blended teaching and learning in post COVID-19 is still being implemented and how effective it is in delivering content.

2. Literature review

2.1. The role of blended learning in higher education

Blended learning combines both face-to-face and online learning with at least some component of learner-centredness and lecturer supervision from home (Staker & Horn, 2012; Sahoo & Bhattacharya, 2021). It incorporates both cutting-edge online technologies with face-to-face instruction and blends both face-to-face instruction and technology-rich activities on various learning online platforms (Umani, 2021). This means that face to face is still crucial, but online tools help students understand even better. It does not mean that technology totally replaces the traditional way of teaching; rather, it modifies it by rendering it more interesting because different students have different learning styles. So, diversifying teaching methods is a good way to approach the challenges that may arise when offering an online course. Our argument is substantiated by the second principle of RAT model that technology amplifies but does not replace face-to-face teaching and learning. It was, therefore, interesting to find out how lecturers alternate between face-to-face and online teaching in post COVID-19 era.

Blended learning fosters learner-centredness in the classroom. Muthuraman (2018) explains that using a blended teaching and learning method is centred on the fact that this system could provide

a useful opportunity for teaching and learning which incorporates lecture-based learning. Therefore, this enables students who are frequently absent from regular physical classes; to better their grades by referring to lectures delivered online and through other recorded lectures and materials at home and at their own pace. Furthermore, even lecturers can deliver classes from wherever they are, either sick, on leave or busy with their academic endeavours to come to campus. This is to say that blended teaching and learning helps students, and lecturers access and use the information wherever they are at their disposal. This suggests that they are free to work on the content until they comprehend it without the pressure sometimes posed by attending classes. This is substantiated by the third RAT principle, which states that without the use of technology, various activities and other forms of lecturers and students' engagement in academic work would be impossible.

Blended teaching and learning provide the flexibility of time and place. This means that lecturers' and students' attitudes and perceptions towards education are transformed because it is viewed as a helpful and comfortable system due to its flexibility (Sakina et al., 2020; Sahoo & Bhattacharya, 2021). The merits offered by the blended system of education are resourceful for lecturers who are willing to execute the system and encourage others to do so. For a few decades, this system was established as the most successful because it contributed positively by helping students to achieve their goals (Masadeh, 2021). This further implies that with regard to blended teaching and learning, the resources are readily available and accessible. Furthermore, when lecturers upload information and material online, students can easily access it and then study at their own pace. They can also ask questions that they did not understand after watching and reading through e-mails or messaging applications.

2.2. Types of blended teaching and learning

Blended learning is a resourceful way of amplifying learning outcomes. This is achieved in three forms; online before campus, online during campus, and online after campus. Students can be fully equipped with skills and knowledge through the aid of these modes (Agarwal, 2021; Wichadee, 2017). Additionally, Dakhi et al. (2020) and Abrosimova et al. (2019) pronounce that implementing blended teaching and learning models lead to improved student learning outcomes. These models are useful to both lecturers and students in the education processes because lecturers can upload material online for students to read or watch at home, and during the class, students complete the tasks with the lecturer's supervision. Mobile Blended Learning is regarded as one of the educational issues in globalisation and technology (Dakhi et al., 2020). This means that with computers and smartphones becoming part of our everyday day life, there is an increase in students' ability to learn, collaborate at a distance and become creative thinkers.

Blended learning models combine formal learning and non-formal learning, class work, independent work, and students to student interaction. The blended model comprises online and classroom teaching (Dakhi et al., 2020; Abrosimova et al., 2019). According to Ayob et al. (2020), there are four blended learning models: the rotational model, the flex model, the self-blend/ à la carte model and the enriched virtual model. The models are presented in figure 1 below.

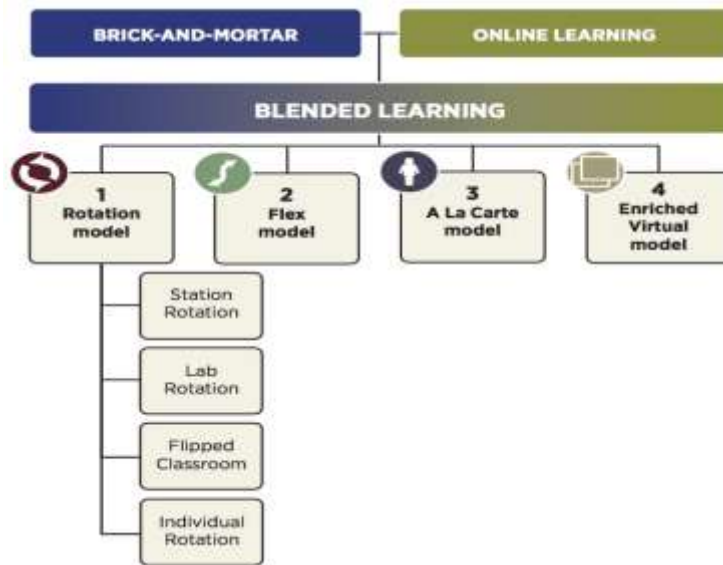


Figure 1 Blended Learning Models (Source: Ayob et al., 2022)

The rotation model is the simplest to implement as it can take various forms in the traditional classroom. Riando (2020) states that lecturers facilitate rotation of learning modalities in this model. They carry it out through full class rotation, learning at home and applying in class (Nagy, 2018). It can also be through an individual personalised schedule (Faustino & Kaur, 2021). There are four main rotational model types under the rotation learning umbrella. This incorporates station rotation, lab rotation, flipped classroom, or individual rotation (Nagy 2018; Ayob et al., 2022). The station rotation model serves as a blended learning setting which incorporates three diverse types of learning modalities which offer discerned and tailored teaching that makes a provision for scaffolding aimed at supporting students in order to augment their performance in the classroom (Nagy, 2018; Faustino & Kaur, 2021). The lab rotation model is a rotation model through which students interchange between numerous learning settings; no less than one is a learning lab (Nagy, 2018). Flipped classroom is a type of rotation model that necessitates students to alternate between online teaching that they usually get while at home and not at school as well as the supervised practice that they get in the classroom, which is also guided by their lecturers (Ibrahim & Nat, 2019). According to Faustino & Kaur (2021, p. 186), "student attention in the learning process is increased through the utilisation of flipped classroom model". This is because students can study on their own at home as well as in school under the auspices of a lecturer. The individual-rotation model is a type of rotation model that permits students to interchange on an individually fixed personalised timetable amid diverse learning modes which comprise at least one technology-rich modality (Horn, 2014; Ibrahim & Nat, 2019).

Additionally, Riando (2020) stresses that the self-blend model offers students the chance to choose and study in areas of education that are not offered in their schools. The model does not entirely depend on the normal classroom setting but **relies on the usage of online educational content, which can be disseminated through various digital devices such as tablets and desktop PC's (Riando, 2020). This model works best with students who are highly motivated and interested in the course (Riando, 2020).** According to Chowdhury (2020), in the flex model, students guide their own learning at school using online material. They have the entire control and decide how they learn since what they are taught is predominately delivered online (Nagy, 2018). The lecturer is always present to guide them and expand their knowledge when required, and this help can be face-to-face or in groups, but students do most of the learning themselves (Faustino & Kaur, 2021). It is important,

therefore, to note that the flex model is commensurate with the technology amplification principle in that learning is self-paced and effective, and it also promotes learner-centredness.

However, in the self-blend model, students decide to fully take some modules online in order to complement their traditional modules (Nagy, 2018). Therefore, students are at liberty to take these modules at home or school to enhance their learning by filling the gaps and needs that traditional teaching might have left behind (Chowdhury, 2020). Lastly, the enriched virtual model is a brick-and-mortar approach which centres more on technology-rich instruction than traditional instruction. Students are given work to complete within a certain period of time, and they do their work online at home. This is a face-to-face interaction between students and a lecturer, but it is executed online, and the lecturer becomes the facilitator (Bryan, 2016; Chowdhury, 2020). It was also paramount to find out the models that lecturers employed in their classrooms and their effectiveness.

3. Methodology

The study is lensed by interpretive paradigm. Interpretivists argue that since reality is mind-constructed and mind-dependent as well as knowledge-subjective, the inquiry is heavily influenced by the researcher's values which in turn inform the choice of the paradigm to unpack the topic under investigation (Chilisa, 2011; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative approach confined to a single case study research design. Merriam (1998) and Yin (2018) define a case study as an experiential method that examines a current phenomenon or the case in profoundness and inside its context in the real world, particularly when the limitations between a phenomenon and the context might not be visibly apparent. The population of the study consisted of lecturers in the selected university. Lecturers (n=20) were purposefully sampled because not everyone could have participated in this study (Polit & Beck, 2017). This further suggests that we viewed the world through the eyes of the participants, thereby drawing conclusions based on their stories and feelings about the phenomenon under investigation (Chilisa, 2011).

Furthermore, face-to-face interviews were used as a tool for data collection. An interview involves asking questions and obtaining answers from a particular population (Creswell, 2014). This can occur face-to-face, through telephone, or through a focus-group discussion, structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, data in this study were collected through face-to-face interviews which were largely conversational, with twenty (n=20) lecturers. Before interviews were conducted, it was indispensable to seek consent from the gatekeepers, so the researchers sought permission from the management of the University. The Registrar of the University and the ethics committee approved this study. Participants were told that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. Consent forms were also provided to participants. Participants were assigned the L code pseudo names for lecturers.

3.1 Positionality

We, therefore, developed our positionality in this study through Savin-Baden and Major's (2013) three crucial steps towards reflexivity. The first step entails locating oneself about the subject which is basically about acknowledging our personal standpoint that had the potential to influence the study. Another step involves locating oneself about the participants. That is, we collectively reflected on how participants viewed us as well as that we might not have been fully aware of how both the participants and we have shaped our personalities. The last step means locating oneself in the context of research and its process, meaning we had to admit having influenced our study and its context. Therefore, we considered ourselves outsiders when we entered the field by adjusting our position in the study to Marshall and Rossman's (2010) explanation that qualitative research is conducted in real-life settings, drawing on several methods that venerate the humanity of the participants in the research study. 'Therefore, we sought to comprehend lecturers' experiences concerning the

phenomenon under investigation by involving ourselves deeply in their world (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

3.2 Data Analysis and trustworthiness

Moreover, data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) example. In this study, we applied the latent thematic analysis because we went beyond the explicit or surface meaning of the data set. Our view of the participants' assumptions was subjective because we used our own words and thoughts to interpret what they told us. We also identified themes in the data inductively. That is, we analysed the responses from the participants through inductive thematic analysis by critically reading through the data to classify meanings related to the topic of the study. Moreover, pieces of data with similar meanings were clustered together and then assigned codes, and the same pieces of text could be incorporated into many categories created from the data set (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). After completing the study, we ensured the trustworthiness of the findings by taking them back to the participants in order to check if their views were correctly captured. Furthermore, we sent our work to an auditor who reviewed, audited and authenticated our study in order to ensure that the findings were the participants' original opinions and not our views. We also sent a copy of our study to our colleagues who were conversant with this field for their input and constructive criticism.

4. Presentation of data

Face-to-face interviews with twenty lecturers were used to gather data on the lecturers' perceptions towards the implementation of blended teaching and learning, as the first question that the study intended to address, as well as the second question on challenges that lecturers encounter in the implementation of blended teaching and learning.

4.1 The lecturers' perceptions towards of blended teaching and learning

Therefore, data from face-to-face interviews with lecturers regarding the first question revealed the following themes: learner autonomy and efficiency.

4.1.1 Learner autonomy

Lecturers revealed that blended learning increases learner autonomy because they take control of their own learning. One lecturer expressed the following.

"I no longer do most of the work in class, but I just introduce a concept, and then I let them to surf the internet and discover things for themselves. Most of them even ask me questions via Google classroom any time, and even at night, I answer some of their questions" (L1).

Another lecturer added the following observation.

"For me, I think it is a good thing to use face-to-face and online learning because students learn best when they do things for themselves. My students always surprise me with the amount of information they find. They are able to go beyond what I have taught them, so I think it is a good strategy to employ" (L5).

Lecturers seem to agree that blended learning promotes learner-centredness in the classroom, and some even agree that learning does not stop even during holidays or in pandemics such as COVID-19 or strikes. This is what one lecturer said.

"I want to assure you that blended learning is a good strategy to use. I was surprised during the height of Covid to see most of my shy students participating in our discussions, and I observed that it was because they were shy to speak in front of others, but they were able to speak when they were alone. The classes also do not stop because we teach them even during strikes because we just send them materials and some links to various websites to read on their own and ask questions (L2).

In addition, another lecturer expressed the following comments.

"The virus taught us a valuable lesson that technology is a new way of effectively delivering our lessons especially given the kind of students whom we teach nowadays who are technologically savvy. I have never stopped using it since then because the registrar of the University likes to move around our offices ensuring that we teach students online. My students also like to do things online and I have seen improvement in their work" (L3).

The above comments from lecturers seem to suggest that online learning should be the strategy that has to be used besides face-to-face learning because of the positive learning opportunities that it offers, especially the promotion of learner-centredness.

4.1.2 Efficiency

Lecturers seem to suggest that blended learning is efficient. Most of them outlined its importance, especially towards teaching and learning. One lecturer uttered the following statement.

"My students are able access the material I send them everywhere. This helps me because they come to class prepared unlike when we used to rely on our lecturers for everything. It also helps me to teach away from work. I remember one time when I was sick and could not come to work, but my class did not stop because I taught from home via zoom" (L6).

In addition, another lecturer expressed the following views.

"The most important part of blended learning is that it is not a must to come to class physically. When I am busy, I just hold a class online via zoom, and I have seen that many students enjoy this approach because some of them dislikes the idea of coming to the campus every day" (L8).

Based on the above comments, most lecturers believe blended learning is a good approach because it is efficient.

4.2 The challenges that lecturers encounter in blended teaching and learning

Findings with lecturers regarding the second question on the challenges that lecturers encounter in the implementation of blended teaching and learning revealed the following themes: poor attendance, financial constraints, application challenges and technological challenges.

4.2.1 Poor attendance

Regarding the challenges that lecturers encounter in the implementation of blended teaching and learning, most lecturers expressed their dissatisfaction as follows;

"Online classes are a good idea, but our students sometimes take chances. Some will just log in and then be silent; you try to ask them questions only to find that they are busy with other things. They just log in for attendance register, so I do not think we are at a level where we can safely say blended learning can be depended upon" (L16).

Another lecturer added the following;

"I no longer teach students online, but I only upload material for them to download and read because some students do not take those classes seriously. One time we had a class online, and one student was at the fields running after the tractor and in class at the same time, so it became ineffective that way because there is no concentration (L4).

The above comments seem to suggest that some students do not take online classes seriously, which might render them ineffective. Lecturers also raised several other challenges in relation to the implementation of blended learning. One lecturer reported that;

"One major challenge regarding the implementation of blended learning in most institutions of higher learning in Lesotho is not all is poor connectivity. Most of our students are from rural areas, so they struggle to access online learning because there is no electricity, and obviously, there won't be any internet (L3).

4.2.2 Financial constraints

The issue of the internet seemed to be a major concern for lecturers because it appeared to be a hindrance to successful blended teaching and learning. Lecturers further mentioned that the lack of internet also affects students negatively. This is what one lecturer said;

"Most of our students are from poor families, so they do not have money to buy data while others do not have computers or smart mobile phones. This becomes a challenge because not all students will be able to attend online classes. However, I am aware that our institutions negotiated with telecommunications companies in the country to provide our students with affordable data, but our students still fail to use it for school work" (L9).

In addition, another lecturer expressed the following comment.

"Money is the real challenge for poor students to buy data, and as a result, they fail to buy data so that they can attend classes. It is unfair to conduct the class online while others are not in attendance, so I always hesitate to use this approach" (L7).

The above comments imply that lecturers find it hard to implement blended teaching and learning because of the financial challenges that poor students encounter.

4.2.3 Application challenges

One IT lecturer raised an interesting challenge they encountered in their faculty concerning Google classroom, which is the main platform lecturers are supposed to use. He expressed the following comments.

"For me, our main challenge is Google classroom because it has very limited features. We 'cannot mark students' works or detect plagiarism, so it is not a good platform to have successful online classes because it does not allow you to have a visual connection with students. However, I have heard that the University is in the process of acquiring Moodle software which other major institutions use because you can detect plagiarism as well as having exams online and marking them at the same time" (L10).

Another lecturer further stipulated that Google classroom has many weaknesses as an online teaching tool, and as a result, they encounter a number of challenges when using it. The lecturer said the following.

"I do not use the app because it lacks important features and is not even compatible with the campus management system we use here" (L11).

4.2.4 Technological challenges

Some lecturers further raised other challenges, which seemed to be caused by their technology phobia or ignorance. One lecturer said the following.

"I do not want to lie; I do not like to teach online because I am challenged when it comes to technology, so I do not like it. They tried some training, but it was only once during COVID-19, so I haven't used it since then because I do not know how to use it" (L20).

The above comment seems to suggest that some lecturers have a negative attitude towards blended learning, so they might not want to implement it all in their classrooms.

5. Discussion of findings

From the above findings, it is apparent that lecturers do embrace the blended teaching and learning approach. Although not all lecturers employ it in their classrooms, those who use it are quite happy because of its benefits. Most lecturers reported that blended teaching and learning promote learner-centredness, which renders students independent and in charge of their learning. This finding is commensurate with Staker and Horn (2012), and Sahoo and Bhattacharya (2021) that blended learning encourages learner-centredness because students can learn independently and then ask their lecturers questions where they need clarifications. The researchers strongly believe blended learning is also a very good scaffolding strategy as it promotes vertical and instructional scaffolding (Nguyen, 2022). Vertical scaffolding entails the role played by parents or mentors by asking students more questions about any topic studied in class, while instructional scaffolding is believed to be at the centre of teaching or in online tutorials where a lecturer assists students in designing the learning chore (Nguyen, 2022). This suggests that students can ask for help from their parents or mentors at home after their online classes. Furthermore, lecturers can arrange their classes following the flipped classroom rotation model wherein students are still supervised in online teaching just like in the physical classroom (Ibrahim & Nat, 2019).

Moreover, lecturers revealed that blended learning is efficient and convenient. This is because students can learn everywhere and at their own pace. They can download materials online and learn in their comfort. This finding resonates with Sakina et al. (2020), and Sahoo and Bhattacharya's (2021) views that blended learning is flexible because students can learn every time and ask questions anytime they wish to. This can happen even after school or at home, and lecturers can also respond to them at any time. Lecturers' views echo the RAT model's second principle, which implies that technology increases efficiency, effectiveness and production in higher learning institutions (Hughes, Thomas & Scharber, 2006). This, therefore, encourages self-paced learning because if students miss some points or part of the content under the common or traditional learning method, they can readily find and retrieve information online to beef up their knowledge.

However, some lecturers revealed that they hesitate to implement blended learning because of challenges beyond their control. One such challenge is students' lack of participation during online classes. Some students just log in and then disappear, rendering online learning inefficient. This revelation is commensurate with Makafane and Chere-Masopha's (2021) finding that attitudes towards online learning make it ineffective because learning cannot occur if students do not attend online classes. Researchers further believe that proponents of traditional teaching approaches might see this finding as a window of opportunity to continue with their traditional way of teaching, where they can physically monitor every student. Also emerging from the findings is the lack of money to buy data, making it difficult for them to attend online classes. This, therefore, means that lecturers will not bother implementing blended teaching and learning if poor students are not able to connect due to a lack of money to buy data. This finding further echoes Makafane and Masopha's (2021) finding that implementing blended teaching without ensuring all students have equal access to online classes is useless.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

COVID-19 forced institutions of higher learning to switch from face-to-face instruction to online learning. The study thus intended to determine if online teaching and learning was a new norm post the pandemic. In order to find out if blended teaching was a new norm, the study, therefore, sought to answer the following questions: (1) what are the lecturers' perceptions towards the implementation of blended teaching and learning post Covid-19? (2) What are the challenges that lecturers encounter in the implementation of blended teaching and learning? Regarding the first question, lecturers revealed that blended teaching is a good strategy because it promotes learner-centredness and is also flexible. Findings in relation to the second question bring to the surface the

challenges that lecturers encounter while implementing blended learning. One of the challenges is that not all students are able to connect to the classroom due to a lack of money to buy data. The study, therefore, concludes that despite the apparent challenges that are faced during the implementation of blended learning and teaching, it is, however, a panacea for traditional education problems. The promotion of learner-centredness is an important aspect that many education systems around the world advocates for, so the researchers feel that blended teaching and learning should be a strategy to be used going forward.

The study thus recommends that institutions of higher learning should encourage their lecturers to employ blended teaching and learning. Furthermore, training for both students and lecturers should be prioritised so that both students and lecturers can be equally conversant with the technology used in the classroom during online classes. Universities should also put measures in place to help all students, regardless of their financial background, access the internet equally, enabling them to learn online.

7. Recommendation for further study

The findings of this study cannot, therefore, be generalisable to other institutions. Therefore, it will be paramount that a similar study is conducted with a larger sample that will include other institutions to better study this phenomenon. Furthermore, students should be included in the sample so that they tell their stories as well without lecturers speaking on their behalf.

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