

## Pre-Service Teachers' Academic Identity and their Lived Experiences in Remote Learning: The New Normal in Curriculum Practice



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### ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Tertiary Institutions of South Africa charged post-secondary institutions to implement measures to achieve the government's social distancing policy. Institutions shifted to remote learning to sustain their core business of teaching and learning. However, there were concerns with the implementation of these measures. For instance, pre-service teachers were seen as ill-equipped and poorly supported during remote learning. This paper aims to contextualise the identity of pre-service economic and management science teachers and reflect on their experiences of curriculum practice during remote learning. Architecture theory was used as the main lens for this study. Furthermore, the goal is to reflect on their adaptation to remote learning as the new normal. Participants' experiences and factors that affected them are discussed as data collected using the critical participatory action learning and action research (CPALAR) approach as a form of critical education science. Critical discourse analysis was used to arrive at the following broad findings: firstly, higher learning institutions are obligated to create practical learning experiences for pre-service teachers. Secondly, participants were directly affected academically, socially, and psychologically. This paper concludes with the recommendation that hybrid learning as the new normal is the future of teaching and learning and should be embraced.

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### INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, governments enacted a range of legislative measures for regulating institutions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures included lockdown and social distancing protocols which various institutions were tasked to observe.<sup>1</sup> The shutdown of educational institutions seems to have resulted in the adoption of remote teaching and learning. Pre-service economic and management science teachers were confronted with an academic identity crisis as they were unprepared and

<sup>1</sup> Tianhong Zhang, "Chinese Parents' Perception of Emergency Remote K-12 Teaching-Learning in China during the COVID-19 Pandemic.," *Asian Journal of Distance Education* 16, no. 1 (2021): 16–30, <http://www.asianjde.org>.

unsupported for the transition to remote learning. Pre-service teachers were able to identify and take pride in academic excellence created by face-to-face learning.<sup>2</sup>

Although pre-service economic and management science teachers were propelled to learn using available online resources for continuity in their studies, respective questions related to curriculum practice and teaching methods, student readiness, teacher workload, and equity in the educational environment remain ambivalent and contentious. Furthermore, Mphuthi and Tshelane discovered that research in the literature demonstrated various flaws to this approach in teaching and learning, flaws broadly reflected a variety of barriers to remote teachings, such as underprovided infrastructure, teacher pedagogical content knowledge inexperience, as well as intricate home environments that are not conducive to learning.<sup>3</sup> Nawastheen and Perera further support this assertion when they discovered that some of the students expressed experiences of anxiety during remote learning.<sup>4</sup> However, Dastidar's arguments oppose this view because these barriers did not affect students' motivation to study remotely.<sup>5</sup>

While there is uncertainty about students' access to electricity, computers, and connectivity during the lockdown, remote learning surfaces have become the preferred method of teaching and learning. There are over 1.4 billion people in Africa, and the world internet penetration statistics reveal that only 28 per cent of Africa's population has access to the internet.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that only three people out of ten have internet access. In contrast, Europe has a significantly higher internet penetration rate, with 89 per cent; this may well mean that about nine out of ten people can access the internet. Furthermore, only about half of the countries have a penetration rate above 20 per cent in Africa. It is thought that Eritrea has the lowest internet penetration rate in Africa, at only 1.3 per cent. In other words, for every 100 people in Eritrea, only 1.3 have access to the internet. Tunisia has the highest rate of internet access in Africa at 64.19 per cent, while South African penetration rate of 57 per cent in 2020, 61 per cent in 2021 and 63 per cent in the current year accessed through mobile phones.

All this is set to change in the future as the African Union has set a goal to achieve universal internet access by 2030.<sup>7</sup> Efforts to introduce and implement remote learning solutions in Ghana were not successful based on Adzovie and Jibril's assertion.<sup>8</sup> They argue that students were not efficiently supported for the transition to remote learning. Nevertheless, students in the institution of higher education in Lesotho that engaged in remote learning seem to suggest that remote learning is an intelligible and helpful tool.<sup>9</sup> However, a lack of resources, few clear instructions from teachers, and a lack of cooperation by some pre-service teachers have all been identified as obstacles to student involvement in remote learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Lavina Sequeira and Charity M. Dacey, "The COVID-19 Diaries: Identity, Teaching, and Learning at a Crossroads," *Frontiers in Education* 5 (December 16, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2020.586123>.

<sup>3</sup> Mochina Mphuthi and Molaodi Tshelane, "Reflections by Pre-Service Economic and Management Sciences Teachers on Their Experiences of Remote Learning in Curriculum Practices," in *Education and New Developments 2022 – Volume I* (inScience Press, 2022), 371–75, <https://doi.org/10.36315/2022v1end084>.

<sup>4</sup> Fareed Mohamed Nawastheen and S. A. S. Kaushalya Perera, "Students' Perceptions on Participating in Remote Learning Activities in the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic," *Studies in Learning and Teaching* 2, no. 3 (December 30, 2021): 33–44, <https://doi.org/10.46627/silet.v2i3.81>.

<sup>5</sup> Sunipa Ghosh Dastidar, "The Impact of Students' Perceptions of Online Learning Environments on Students' Satisfaction in the Context of Covid-19 Pandemic," *Studies in Learning and Teaching* 2, no. 3 (December 30, 2021): 61–72, <https://doi.org/10.46627/silet.v2i3.84>.

<sup>6</sup> Statista, "Mobile Internet User Penetration in South Africa from 2018 to 2027," 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/972866/south-africa-mobile-internet-penetration/>.

<sup>7</sup> Statista, "Mobile Internet User Penetration in South Africa from 2018 to 2027," 2022

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Edem Adzovie and Abdul Bashiru Jibril, "Assessment of the Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Prospects of e-Learning in Higher Learning Institutions: The Mediating Role of Academic Innovativeness and Technological Growth," *Cogent Education* 9, no. 1 (December 31, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2041222>.

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Lihotetso Matee, Nthabiseng Motlohi, and Palesa Nkiwane, "Emerging Perspectives and Challenges for Virtual Collaborative Learning in an Institution of Higher Education: A Case of Lesotho," *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITSE-06-2021-0110>.

Using electronic gadgets and media to deliver instructional content for remote learning provides access to information, ease of updating content, personalised instruction in curriculum practice, standardised content, and accountability. Remote learning increases access to information and supports and enhances teaching and learning. In agreement with the statement, Koutsouba, Koutsouba, and Gkiosos allude that remote learning involves a combination of pre-service teachers and teacher-educator communication; thus, remote learning is the application of processes to create, distribute, manage, and enable learning through access to an online network.<sup>10</sup>

Tshelane discusses the range of research on academic work, especially as roles change to reflect a changing university sector that has taken place in recent years in response to the challenges of a changing environment and new roles facing academics.<sup>11</sup> Researchers are addressing the challenge of a changing environment and new roles by researching academic work and identity.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the teacher's "personal histories, rooted in educational experiences, professional experiences and cultural encounters," the teacher's identity is "subject to constant negotiation due to changing contextual elements, such as the classroom culture, instructional materials, and reactions from students and colleagues."<sup>13</sup>

The notion of academic identity is, therefore, one that embraces an individual's ideas regarding the kind of work they are interested in, their values and ambitions, as well as their commitments and affiliations. Academic identities are always constructed, negotiated, and actualised in everyday practices and institutional settings based on one's own experiences and those of others. In this sense, academic identity is not a static entity but is constantly reshaped and redefined by interaction, reflections and discussions with others, time, and changing contexts. For this reason, our approach to the academic identity of pre-service economic and management science teachers takes into account the prevailing cultural narratives of identity represented by pre-service EMS teachers in the context of their reflections and interactions about the curriculum practice that shaped their experiences during the transition and learning using remote learning systems.

Remote learning is characterised in the South African context as an ICT-enhanced practice utilised by teacher educators at universities, initially with the availability of e-mail, online learner management systems, and free Wi-Fi in libraries and across campus to enable pre-service teachers to engage in a learning process. According to studies, technological interventions for teaching, learning, and evaluation help students develop their critical thinking skills while empowering teacher educators to effectively distribute and provide knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge in the curriculum enables the ease of journey for self-discovery and identity in the education space. Moreover, the remote is a flexible or lively process rather than a static one. Tulaskar and Turunen deduce that remote learning may be defined as a method used to establish teaching and learning processes via the use of the internet and information technology devices.<sup>14</sup> This implies that remote learning will also improve with technological developments over time.

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<sup>10</sup> Konstandina Koutsouba, Maria Koutsouba, and Yiannis Gkiosos, "Elements of Fairness in Tertiary E-Learning Distance Education in Covid-19 Era," *Διεθνές Συνέδριο Για Την Ανοικτή & Εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση* 11, no. 1A (January 22, 2022): 30–39, <https://doi.org/10.12681/ICODL.3494>.

<sup>11</sup> Molaodi David Tshelane, "Participatory Action Research and the Construction of Academic Identity among Postgraduate Research Students," *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 9, no. 3 (December 30, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v9i3.188>.

<sup>12</sup> Jennie Billot and Virginia King, "Understanding Academic Identity through Metaphor," *Teaching in Higher Education* 20, no. 8 (November 17, 2015): 833–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1087999>; Oili-Helena Ylijoki and Jani Ursin, "The Construction of Academic Identity in the Changes of Finnish Higher Education," *Studies in Higher Education* 38, no. 8 (October 2013): 1135–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.833036>.

<sup>13</sup> Hyesun Cho, "The Complexity and Hybridity of Social Identity," in *Critical Literacy Pedagogy for Bilingual Preservice Teachers* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), 121–60, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7935-1\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7935-1_6).

<sup>14</sup> Rucha Tulaskar and Markku Turunen, "What Students Want? Experiences, Challenges, and Engagement during Emergency Remote Learning amidst COVID-19 Crisis," *Education and Information Technologies* 27, no. 1 (January 20, 2022): 551–87, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10747-1>.

The use of remote learning in curriculum practice is one of the reforms in the South African package that caught pre-service economic and management science teachers unprepared and unequipped to learn remotely. Additionally, approximately 65 per cent of students at the institutions of higher learning said that they had learnt less during the lockdown because of the transition from classrooms to online learning.<sup>15</sup> Despite their efforts to continue studying and training, about half believed their studies would be delayed and 9 per cent thought they would fail. Remote learning has been poorly implemented in higher education for various reasons, including the quality of teaching, the availability of support services, equipment and infrastructure, and the creation of a conducive study environment.<sup>16</sup>

This study similarly intended to capture the discussions by pre-service economic and management science teachers on their lived experiences in curriculum practice and how these experiences contextualised the search to reshape their identity that will embrace hybrid teaching and learning as the future of instructional delivery and the new normal. They may need to reshape their identities to align with their teaching and learning contexts rather than create new identities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is underpinned by architecture theory. The term theory of architecture was originally simply an accepted translation of the Latin term “ratiocinatio” used by Vitruvius to differentiate intellectual from practical knowledge in architectural education.<sup>17</sup> Such reasoned judgements are an essential part of the creative architectural process. In addition, Vitruvius suggests that building can be designed only by a continuous creative, intellectual dialectic between imagination and reason in the mind of each creator. This theory analyses the origins and development of architectural form, style, ideologies, movements, and architects throughout history.<sup>18</sup>

Vitruvius believed that architecture depends on several principles, each with its own weight and value on the projects.<sup>19</sup> Thus the first one is ordered. He considered that a building is made out of small parts or modules and the selection of these modules will give the building order and proper form. The second is the arrangement. To achieve a good border in arrangement, Vitruvius asked the architects to rely on careful thinking, pay attention to all the details and use innovation to solve each problem. The third and fourth principles are harmony and symmetry. These two principles are connected, and each moves the project towards beauty. A beautiful design should have its height suited to its width and length. Symmetry is the relational beauty between each element of the design. This concept inspired “Vitruvian Man” by Leonardo Davinci.<sup>20</sup> Explanation of symmetry is embodied in the use of the human body analogy, where harmony and symmetry are found between the forearm, foot, palm finger and all the other body parts in the same concept applies to the perfect building.<sup>21</sup>

Architectural theory is based on the present and the future and how the future is planned, built or organised. The theory of architecture is relevant to this study because of the advocacy that architecture cannot be taught and that people can only guide people during the process using

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<sup>15</sup> Statista, “Mobile Internet User Penetration in South Africa from 2018 to 2027.”

<sup>16</sup> Mphuthi, and Tshelane, “Reflections by pre-service Economic and Management Sciences teachers.” 371-375.

<sup>17</sup> Fred Rush, “A Philosopher Looks at Architecture,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 80, no. 1 (January 6, 2022): 109–12, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaac/kpab070>.

<sup>18</sup> Stefan Ekman, “Vitruvius, Critics, and the Architecture of Worlds: Extra-Narrative Material and Critical World-Building,” *Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research (Fafnir)* 6, no. 1 (2019): 118–31.

<sup>19</sup> C Koranteng, S O Afram, and E Ayeke, “A Review on Seven Principles of Architecture,” *International Journal of Engineering Research* 11, no. 11 (2015): 27–34, [www.ijerd.com](http://www.ijerd.com).

<sup>20</sup> Salvatore Magazù, Nella Coletta, and Federica Migliardo, “The Vitruvian Man of Leonardo Da Vinci as a Representation of an Operational Approach to Knowledge,” *Foundations of Science* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 751–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-019-09616-5>.

<sup>21</sup> Sultanova Dilshoda Namazovna, “Harmony Of Art In Architecture Of Uzbekistan,” *The American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations* 3, no. 05 (May 17, 2021): 87–94, <https://doi.org/10.37547/TAJSSEI/VOLUME03ISSUE05-16>.

intellectual dialectic.<sup>22</sup> The study adopts the Vitruvius approach to principles of teaching and learning, which allows the pre-service economic and management science teachers to deepen the discussions as they reflect on their lived experiences with the aim of reshaping their identities to align with the new normal. Reflecting on lived experiences further revealed how pre-service economic and management science teachers' experiences continue a path that will enhance their motivation to learn remotely and sustain teaching and learning in the future.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research methodology to address the research objectives. It is also part of an ongoing study that intends to examine the experiences of pre-service economic and management science teachers on the use of remote learning and how this mode of study can be translated into hybrid learning in preparation for future teaching and learning. The study used a free attitude discussions technique to generate data using the critical participatory action learning and action research (CPALAR) approach as a form of critical education science. CPALAR is referred to since it pilgrimages three principles of responsible research innovations such as recognition of participants, establishing professional learning communities and critical reflections deliberately embracing diversity characterised in the unequal context of South African education. CPALAR allowed participants to share their lived experiences and critical reflections, in this case, by deliberately embracing diversity in the unequal context of South African education.<sup>23</sup> The data was provided by economic and management sciences pre-service teachers. Economic and management sciences teacher education is intended to empower student teachers to teach grades 8 and 9 learners, focusing on financial literacy, business studies and economics.

## Participants and Selection Procedure

The participants in the study were pre-service economic and management science teachers in one of the twenty-six institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The pre-service economic and management science teachers in this study were final year teacher education students under the stream economic and management science, Bachelor of Education: Economic and Management Science (B.Ed EMS). For the purpose of this study, PST is used as a pseudonym to represent pre-service economic and management science teachers. The students were selected purposefully as they come from the same stream and individually had their share of the same challenge of academic identity crisis emanating from the transition from face-to-face into remote learning. The pre-service economic and management science teachers in this study were final-year teacher education students under the economic and management science stream. Twenty pre-service teachers were recruited and encouraged to be part of the study using a purposeful sampling approach. The study was conducted with nine pre-service economic and management science teachers. Their profile is depicted below:

## Table 1: Demographic profile of participants

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<sup>22</sup> Molaodi David Tshelane, "Reimagining Responsible Research Innovations Regarding Professional Teaching Standards for Curriculum Practice," *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 5, no. 1 (March 28, 2022): 92–105, <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2022.8>.

<sup>23</sup> Tshelane, "Reimagining responsible research innovations regarding professional teaching standards for, 92-105.

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Year of Study</b> | <b>Qualification</b> |
|------------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| PST 1            | Male          | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 2            | Female        | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 3            | Male          | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 4            | Male          | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 5            | Male          | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 6            | Male          | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 7            | Female        | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 8            | Male          | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |
| PST 9            | Female        | Final year           | B.Ed EMS             |

**Table 2: Variable differentiation of participants**

| <b>Variable</b>  | <b>Groups</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|------------------|---------------|----------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>    | Male          | 6        | 66%            |
|                  | Female        | 3        | 33%            |
| <b>Age Group</b> | 18-25         | 7        | 78%            |
|                  | 25-30         | 1        | 11%            |
|                  | 30-35         | 1        | 11%            |

**Instrumentation**

The researchers used a free attitude discussion to collect data from participants using an online learner management system. The discussion was online due to lockdown regulations that did not permit face-to-face contact. The discussions in the unstructured interview allowed the participants to freely share their experiences of remote learning and how that impacted their academic identity.

**Ethical Consideration**

The participants in this study were guaranteed their freedom to contribute to a free attitude discussion. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study whenever they felt uncomfortable. We also took extra measures to hide the participants' identities throughout the study. For confidentiality under the findings, we used pseudonyms to identify pre-service economic and management science teachers as participants in the study: Pre-service teacher 1 is identified as PST 1, Pre-service teacher 2 is identified as PST 2, Pre-service teacher 3 is identified as PST 3, Pre-service teacher 4 is identified as PST 4, Pre-service teacher 5 is identified as PST 5, Pre-service teacher 6 is identified as PST 6, Pre-service teacher 7 is identified as PST 7, Pre-service teacher 8 is identified as PST 8, and Pre-service teacher 9 is identified as PST 9. This study will use the term pre-service economic and management science teachers and participants interchangeably. It was important for this study to achieve trustworthiness in the same way that reliability and validity are monitored. The data collection process was conducted with the utmost honesty and respect to maintain quality, credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, conformability, and transferability, but no approval was sought. The study was designed and conducted by the researchers at their discretion as no funding was sort for conducting the study.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Teaching practice during remote learning**

The COVID-19 pandemic is continually causing tremendous harm to people all over the world, and it is impermissible for the study not to mention this in this issue when we look towards a new normal and more positive future. Pre-service teacher education programs recognise the importance of classroom practice, also referred to as teaching practice, in improving the quality of pre-service teachers and educators. This strategy is widely used in teacher education programmes in South Africa and is also used internationally.<sup>24</sup> There is also a general understanding that the more teachers practice their teaching, the more proficient they will become in the content knowledge, methodology, and pedagogical content knowledge of pre-service teachers. It also allows them to form their own identity as professionals. This is further discussed by Omodan and Ige, raising a need for the studies to ensure the curriculum is tailored towards students' content knowledge and whether the new normal is more productive, as well as detects if the academic identity of pre-service economic and management teachers could be easily redefined using remote learning methodologies.<sup>25</sup>

During the discussions intended to establish if pre-service teachers were confident enough to teach economic and management science in grades 8 and 9 using remote teaching and learning techniques, their responses seemed to confirm their confidence. The comments by PST 7 are notable in this regard:

*“I can confidently say that remote learning has exposed me to sufficient online information that will empower me with pedagogical content knowledge. I can also say that I will be able to deliver a lesson using the same mode of teaching and learning. My concern is that I may be placed in a school where remote learning is not yet practised.”*

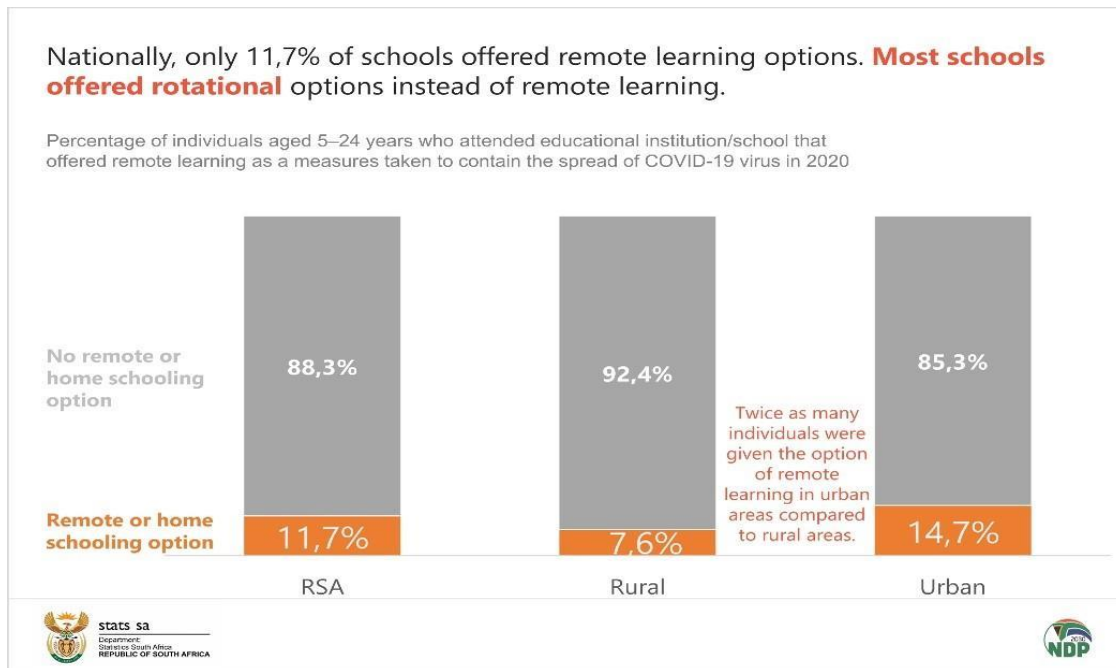
The imposed lockdown regulations had an impact on an average of 2.3 million students enrolled in post-secondary education and training institutions.<sup>26</sup> New educational policies and regulations were established for the education sector, including academic timetable adjustments, new instructional programmes, methods of delivery, and curriculum catch-up. Figure 1 below depicts the teaching and learning patterns that existed in the South African schooling context during the COVID-19 pandemic. It illustrates the comparison between use and access to remote learning in rural and urban areas.

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<sup>24</sup> Davide Parmigiani et al., “Global Competence and Teacher Education Programmes. A European Perspective,” *Cogent Education* 9, no. 1 (December 31, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.2022996>.

<sup>25</sup> Bunmi Isaiah Omodan and Olugbenga A Ige, “University Students’ Perceptions of Curriculum Content Delivery During COVID-19 New Normal in South Africa,” *Qualitative Research in Education* 10, no. 2 (June 28, 2021): 204–27, <https://doi.org/10.17583/QRE.2021.7446>.

<sup>26</sup> Statista, “Mobile Internet User Penetration in South Africa from 2018 to 2027.”



**Figure 1 Remote learning rate in South African Schools<sup>27</sup>**

Remote learning programmes were not only designed by the institutions of higher learning for pre-service teachers, but the school also designed programmes that encouraged a transition to remote learning. However, the learning dynamics in South Africa reflect an adaptation of a rotational system by a majority of the schools, as depicted in Figure 1 above, while pre-service teachers were being prepared for teaching in the school using remote learning. Statistics South Africa's new research reveals that only 11.7 per cent of schools in the country offer remote learning choices, as depicted in Figure 1 above.<sup>28</sup> Rotating alternative programmes was offered more frequently than remote learning in the schools. And there was a clear urban-rural divide, with urban learners receiving twice as many remote learning opportunities as rural learners.

It remains the responsibility of the institutions of higher learning to ensure a link between the curriculum they practise in preparing pre-service teachers for their future role as professional teachers. Additionally, Dube, Makura, Modise, and Tarman further argue that COVID-19 has called for reconfiguration in how the curriculum has been implemented in the institutions of higher learning to produce disciplines that are relevant to the market and to adapt to pandemic-induced changes in reality.<sup>29</sup> There are increasing calls for tertiary institutions to revisit and reconfigure their methodologies to prepare and empower pre-service teachers with relevant pedagogical content knowledge that will apply to hybrid learning as the future and the new normal in teaching and learning.

### **Lived Experience during Remote Learning Experiences in access and connectivity**

It is a particularly challenging time for pre-service teachers and teacher educators as they transition through a career change and uncertainty in terms of their academic and professional identity. The rapid move to remote learning instruction to engage students has resulted in significantly increased workloads for teacher educators as they work to shift teaching content and materials into the online

<sup>27</sup> Statistics South Africa., “Education Series Volume VIII COVID-19 and Barriers to Participation in Education in South Africa, 2020 Report No. 92-01-08.” (Pretoria, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Statistics South Africa. *Education Series Volume VIII COVID-19*.

<sup>29</sup> Bekithemba Dube et al., “COVID-19 and the Quest for Reconfiguration of Disciplines: Unpacking New Directions,” *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 5, no. 1 (March 28, 2022): i–viii, <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2002.12>.



space, as well as become proficient with the necessary software tools and learner management systems.<sup>30</sup> As seen, teaching and learning institutions are experiencing difficulty adjusting to the move to remote learning and teachers are struggling to adjust to what is likely to be the "new normal" for a lengthy period.

Up to 78 per cent of the participants in this study, as depicted in Figure 1 which represented the pre-service teachers between the ages of 18 to 25 years, indicated that they did not experience challenges regarding the use of technological gadgets while they raised concerns over access to those gadgets and connectivity. While the participants in the age group 25 to 35 years did raise concerns over a need for training on how to use some of the instruments that would have been provided for access to remote learning, they also indicated the downside, which seems to share the concerns by the younger participants on issues of access and connectivity.

### **PST 1**

*"Since last year, I have not really encountered any problems with using remote learning except for challenges like data problems. And with the remote learning method, I have realised that my marks have improved. The other thing is that I did not really know how to write an assignment. I did not know how to do proper research. I did not know how to do the referencing but with the introduction of lockdown, it is like I only had myself and had to learn how to do all these things successfully."*

### **PST 5**

*"I am so excited. My research mark is good through e-learning. What else? I am independent. I do not have to rely on other people, even when we do assignments. I know I am well and can do it by myself, so I always try to shine. Not in a bad way, but by being an example to others that this is actually how you should do it. Especially with the references, I realised that most students still do not know how to do it. And before COVID-19, I was literally one of those students. Remote learning is just so good."*

### **PST 8**

*"For me, the first few months of remote learning were a nightmare; it gave me a lot of sleepless nights. I was used to attending lectures and writing notes down. Abruptly abandoning that learning method and switching to remote learning was not easy for me. The struggle to access data prolonged my agony."*

### **Experiences of impact on academics**

One of the participants shared how the institution had inadequately prepared them for remotely attending lessons. Some of them fell behind because of their inability to keep up with the remote attendance of lessons. This is evident from the narrative shared by one of the participants:

### **PST 4**

*"The institution was not ready to adapt. Even the lecturers had not received training, which in turn gave us a problem when we had to learn through them. Worse for remote learning is that as much as we do the assignments online, working from home was not the same as accessing unlimited Wi-Fi and data on campus; it made the transition a traumatic experience. I practically fell behind my work."*

The main challenge in the discussions arose from the participant's location as well as the meagre infrastructure where the participant is located. Isolation has a distinct impact on academic performance, much more so if the student lives miles away from the enrolled university.<sup>31</sup> Some

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<sup>30</sup> Cho, *The Complexity and Hybridity of Social Identity*, 121-160.

<sup>31</sup> Jayrome Lleva Núñez, "Lived Experience of Overcoming the Feeling of Isolation in Distance Learning in the Philippines: A Phenomenological Inquiry," *Pakistan Journal of Distance & Online Learning* 7, no. 2 (2021): 56-68, <http://journal.aiou.edu.pk/journal1/index.php/PJDOL/article/view/1330>.

participants shared the narrative that their home environment was not enabled and conducive to learning. This was evident in the response PST 7 gave, which is noted:

*I come from a rural area in the KwaZulu Natal province. I was supposed to travel to the nearest town to access the network but with the travel restrictions, I had to seek the highest point in the mountains to access the internet network at the expense of my safety. Rural areas are famous for harbouring wild animals.*

Additionally, there was an increased breakdown of communication between the pre-service teachers and the teacher educators. Sometimes pre-service teachers will e-mail the lecturer seeking clarification on a missed assessment due to network issues, but the lecturer will not respond. As a learner management system, Blackboard was used by institutions of higher learning to reach out to students. This system was also compromised due to frequent breakdowns of the system. Teaching and learning, including a messaging system that allows communication, would also be compromised, delaying communication with pre-service teachers.

PST 2 said, “*Several times, the lecturer will not respond to e-mails and this was frustrating.*” This lack of communication contributed to anxiety and uncertainty about the future.

Ultimately, it became apparent that pre-service economic and management science teachers recognised the impact of remote learning, that it is efficient and effective, and is likely to be part of hybrid learning in the future as the new normal. In the future, it is necessary to investigate unstable Internet connections, expensive and inadequate data provision by the university, and a home environment that does not support learning and how innovative ideas can be engineered to support and enable hybrid learning as the future of teaching and learning.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having examined teacher identity within the changing landscapes of their social environment, as well as the changing plotlines of their learning context, this study found that pre-service teachers do not necessarily have to create new identities in change but rather adopt the changing environment theory, and re-imagining their academic identity. This indicates that further research on this topic is needed to clarify the identities of pre-service economic and management science teachers in the practice of the curriculum that advocated for hybrid teaching and learning post their learning in the classroom and also include the field where they will practise as novice teachers.

A person's experiences impact how they think, feel and act. Omodan and Tsotetsi suggest that the impact of education in creating the experiences of individuals should not be underrated.<sup>32</sup> Improving educational processes, whether in formal or informal settings, is an essential aspect of personal growth and adds to self-re-imagination and identity through engagements with others. The effective integration of remote learning into the classroom can ensure that pre-service teachers meaningfully interact with information. In this sense, pre-service teachers will develop the ability to think critically, improving their language, comprehension, cognition, and critical thinking skills.<sup>33</sup> Hence, integrating remote learning within the classroom will empower pre-service teachers to participate actively in the information culture.

One benefit of remote learning is that it improves pre-service teachers' performance and engagement in the learning process. Grynyuk et al. also argue that with remote learning, learners

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<sup>32</sup> Bunmi I. Omodan and Cias T. Tsotetsi, “Student-Teacher Relationship as a Panacea for Students' Academic Performance in Nigerian Secondary Schools: An Attachment Perspective,” *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 9, no. 4 (2018): 82–101,

[https://www.academia.edu/64682273/Student\\_Teacher\\_Relationship\\_as\\_a\\_Panacea\\_for\\_Students\\_Academic\\_Performance\\_in\\_Nigerian\\_Secondary\\_Schools\\_An\\_Attachment\\_Perspective](https://www.academia.edu/64682273/Student_Teacher_Relationship_as_a_Panacea_for_Students_Academic_Performance_in_Nigerian_Secondary_Schools_An_Attachment_Perspective).

<sup>33</sup> Yameng Zhang, “The Research on Critical Thinking Teaching Strategies in College English Classroom,” *Creative Education* 13, no. 04 (2022): 1469–85, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2022.134090>.

become flexible and even motivated.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, it engages both the teacher educator and pre-service teachers by promoting active participation and self-regulated learning. Since the teacher educator would have achieved all the objectives and the pre-service teachers would have understood the content, the teacher educator would not be required to repeat one topic repeatedly.

Since research has shown different opinions and beliefs of students towards remote learning,<sup>35</sup> students' attitudes toward remote learning often reflect how they feel about experiences and their likes and dislikes. They indicate that attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are linked to their experiences.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, literature discovered that students in developing countries had a positive attitude towards remote learning.<sup>37</sup> This is because remote technology is believed to increase students' motivation and self-esteem. Active students have more control of what and when they learn and can also help to create a productive learning environment that enhances critical thinking skills.<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that while technology may improve the classroom situation and engage students more effectively, the development of technology cannot replace the physical learning space, which fosters a healthy teacher educator – pre-service teacher rapport, which the traditional method best provides. This is supported by Suprpto, Zamroni, Abidah, and Wulandar in their assertion that remote learning experience as the new normal will have advantages and disadvantages.<sup>39</sup> Hence this study encourages hybrid learning as the future, incorporating both teaching and learning methods as the instruction that enforces the curriculum practice.

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<sup>34</sup> Svetlana Grynyuk et al., "Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Experience of Ukraine's Higher Education System," *Electronic Journal of E-Learning* 20, no. 3 (March 28, 2022): pp242-256, <https://doi.org/10.34190/ejel.20.3.2198>.

<sup>35</sup> Jani Ursin et al., "Emotionally Loaded Identity and Agency in Finnish Academic Work," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 44, no. 3 (March 15, 2020): 311–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1541971>.

<sup>36</sup> Nadi Suprpto et al., "The Pros and Cons of the 'New Normal' Concept during COVID-19 Outbreak," *EDUTECH: Journal of Education And Technology* 4, no. 3 (March 15, 2021): 412–27, <https://doi.org/10.29062/edu.v4i3.179>.

<sup>37</sup> Matee, Motlohi, and Nkiwane, "Emerging Perspectives and Challenges for Virtual Collaborative Learning in an Institution of Higher Education: A Case of Lesotho."

<sup>38</sup> Bunmi Isaiah Omodan, "The Potency of Social Constructivism on Classroom Productivity in Universities," *Studies in Learning and Teaching* 3, no. 1 (April 30, 2022): 36–45, <https://doi.org/10.46627/silet.v3i1.97>.

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