

The perspectives of lecturers at the University of Guyana regarding the Emergency Remote Education Environment implemented at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

The University of Guyana continued its teaching activities and implemented Emergency learning platforms that utilized online interfaces to re-create the classroom virtually, termed Emergency Remote Education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this qualitative-descriptive-phenomenological study is to garner the perspectives of lecturers regarding Emergency Remote Education-learning platforms. The study used focus-group discussions conducted via the Zoom platform. Eight (8) lecturers were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling.

The major themes of the study resulted from saturation and were reflections shared by (100%) of all the participants of the study, such as the University's status before implementing Emergency Learning, the Lecturer's response post-implementation, long-term complications, and Future undertakings.

The study highlights the perspectives of lecturers in modifying and optimizing eLearning platforms at the University of Guyana as well as students. It also acts as grounding for ongoing research regarding the evolving Remote eLearning Environment used at the University of Guyana.

Keywords: Emergency eLearning, Remote eLearning environment, eLearning, Thematic Content Analysis, COVID-19.

1. Introduction

eLearning platforms have become abundantly available with the advent of the internet. COVID-19 has accelerated the use of online platforms in the higher education learning environment and as such, many institutions are adopting techniques meant to improve their eLearning status (Kulal and Nayak 2020). The online environment represents an interface with many domains. It facilitates the student having real-time contact with lecturers who utilize a variety of electronic modalities to provide content that applies to the student's learning needs (Whittle et al., 2020). Before the pandemic eLearning seemed to be a process that would gradually evolve in the educational sphere, the same could not be said when COVID-19 became an actuality. The University of Guyana, like many other institutions worldwide, was forced to re-engineer its approach to learning. This sudden change left little time for details to be fleshed out from empirical evidence and thus left much to be deciphered and questioned. The implementation of eLearning platforms worldwide has even been described as a "lifeline" for the Higher education system (Thapaliya., 2023; Whittle et al., 2020).

This research project was undertaken to assess and qualify the factors that our lecturers faced in this transition period. It served to understand their perceptions, practices, method of course delivery and assessment techniques, approach to student issues, experiences, future recommendations, and suggestions in furthering eLearning practices at the University of Guyana.

2. Literature review

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic and issued recommendations for preventive measures to curb the transmission of the coronavirus worldwide (Whittle et al., 2020). Even with the implementation of various prevention strategies, the pandemic impacted every facet of human existence, including the realm of

education. Consequently, a global learning crisis emerged as a direct consequence of the pandemic's widespread effects (Thapaliya, 2023).

COVID-19 significantly disrupted higher education globally, with over 1.6 billion students affected and institutions transitioning to remote teaching methods (Liu., 2022; Ferri et al., 2020; Whittle et al., 2020). Educational institutions at higher levels were compelled to transition to remote teaching methods during this period. A wealth of literature highlighted the widespread impact of COVID-19 on individuals globally, with educational establishments being no exception (Whittle et al., 2020).

The COVID-19-induced educational crisis differed significantly from carefully planned online learning experiences, catching instructors, students, and parents off guard and unprepared (Hodges et al., 2020). Referred to as emergency remote teaching, this impromptu approach emerged as a direct response to the pandemic, aiming not to recreate a fully developed educational system but to swiftly establish temporary access to instruction and support services during the crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). Unlike well-structured online courses, which offer flexible and alternative learning environments, emergency remote teaching imposes an obligation on students to shift entirely to online learning platforms (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020)

Quite a few researchers (Liu., 2022; Houlden & Veletsianos., 2020; Whittle et al., 2020) have observed that the COVID-19 crisis expedited the implementation of emergency remote teaching, online teaching, and virtual instruction, all without affording educators adequate professional development opportunities to adapt their typical teaching methods. Consequently, instructors frequently grapple with challenges related to the necessary skills and knowledge for effective online and remote teaching (Dhawan, 2020).

A comprehensive study was conducted by Flack et al. (2020) which involved 3,500 primary and secondary teachers in Australia and New Zealand, revealing that teachers believed students needed additional instructional support due to the impact of COVID-19. Social isolation adversely affects students' well-being and learning potential. Lorenza and Carter (2021) explored Emergency Online Teaching (EOT) effects on undergraduate students in Australian universities, emphasizing the need for adjusted pedagogy in online learning. Authors Erlam et al. (2021) studied university teaching experiences during the pandemic, highlighting challenges like miscommunication, technology access, and work-life balance. Despite challenges, remote teaching offered benefits such as enhanced flexibility and learner autonomy.

However, the University of Guyana is no different. In her paper titled “Sudden Change of Pedagogy in Education Driven by COVID-19: Perspectives and Evaluation from a Developing Country,” Mrs Temitayo Oyedotun, a lecturer at the University of Guyana, shared insights into the challenges faced during the transition to online learning in Guyana. She identified five key challenges: inadequate infrastructure, lack of resources, limited prior training for both lecturers and students, strained teacher-student relationships resulting in reduced engagement and deadline issues, and the added stress of balancing school and family life at home (Goodchild Van Hilten, 2021).

Despite these challenges, Mrs. Oyedotun highlighted some positive outcomes. Educators found innovative ways to teach, even resorting to using platforms like WhatsApp on their phones when necessary. Both lecturers and students acquired new skills and adapted to the situation. Mrs Oyedotun emphasized the importance of personal growth and software skill development during this transition (Goodchild Van Hilten, 2021).

In response to the challenges faced, Mrs Oyedotun proposed ten recommendations based on her research. These recommendations included providing technical assistance, offering amenities such as laptops and internet access, and adopting a more flexible approach regarding deadlines. She emphasized the need for reassurance and options for students, considering their diverse situations and challenges. Mrs Oyedotun's recommendations have been valuable not only in Guyana but also in other developing countries navigating the shift to online learning during the crises of the pandemic (Goodchild Van Hilten, 2021).

In summary, the global learning crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic forced higher education institutions to rapidly adopt emergency remote teaching methods. Despite the hurdles encountered by educators and students, they embraced innovative strategies, encouraging adaptability and the acquisition of new skills.

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of lecturers regarding the emergency remote online learning platforms used and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the Lecturer's views on the factors that influence productive activity and learning in this setting?
3. What are the perceived benefits of the remote eLearning platform for students?

Aims

- To explore the perspectives of University of Guyana lecturers on the Emergency Remote Education Environment implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To understand the views of these lecturers on the factors that influence productive activity and learning in the Emergency Remote Education Environment.

Objectives

1. To review the literature on the views of lecturers/professors and their perspectives regarding emergency remote online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To explore the views and factors associated with productive learning and productive activity in the emergency remote online learning environment implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic at the University of Guyana using semi-structured interviews with University of Guyana Lecturers to attain data saturation.
3. To identify themes on the views and factors associated with productive activity and learning in the emergency remote online learning environment implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic at the University of Guyana, using thematic content analysis.

2.1 Epistemology

Assuming that knowledge is gained in a bottom-up manner, inductive logic was used to build knowledge through observations to understand the Lecturer's perspectives on the implementation of remote eLearning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The factors that influence productive activity for both lecturers and students in the remote eLearning environment implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic are many. Investigating, identifying, and qualifying these factors allows the researcher to understand the associations that were formed in the learning environment.

Understanding the associations formed in the remote eLearning environment, in the long run, could lead to the development of new theories or policies that can inform teaching and learning in the

online setting (Kim, 2001). Deductive logic is denoted by hypothesis derivation. Deduction is based on an existing theory that is tested, in an inductive approach there is no hypothesis, however, several assumptions are made from previous works (Kim, 2001). In this study, the assumptions made were that lecturers encounter students in the emergency remote eLearning environment and that during these encounters, they are faced with challenges that they must either overcome or consider as limitations.

2.2 Positionality

As burgeoning educationists, it is important to note that the team has encountered instances where lecturers strongly advocate for the use of traditional classroom settings often to the detriment of their students. Sometimes lecturers choose to not accept the realities of technological advancements altogether, entirely sidelining the advantages that exist. The team of researchers have often grappled with the principle that everyone deserves the right to be heard and to have an opinion absent judgment. Our scientific convictions should not be the sole answer to such a complex issue as introducing online educational resources at University, emergently or otherwise (Chowdhury, 2014). In addition to this, we have often found it challenging to understand why some lecturers not only resist learning about online teaching and learning methods but also why they distrust technological educational advancements. Understanding Lecturers' perspectives and how they approached the emergency remote learning environment is pivotal to garnering an appreciation for the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

3. Method

3.1 Participant Recruitment and Setting

This study focused on inviting lecturers to be a part of the study using a combination sampling method approach (Wu, 2021). A combination of snowball and purposive sampling was exploited while at the same time participant consent forms for recruitment were sent to the Universities' communication interface DECC for scrutiny and circulation. The participants that were contacted were contacted via phone call and the participant's consent sheet was shared with them for their perusal and signing before the conduction of the interview (Khoshsima et al., 2018; Kulal & Nayak, 2020; Naderifar et al., 2017). After the consent forms were signed and returned the discussions were conducted. The discussions were conducted as two separate in-depth focus groups discussion, consisting of four participants each. Eight (8) participants were recruited, and the focus group discussion was carried out in two batches to meet the availability of the participants. The focus group discussions were carried out via the Zoom platform where each participant agreed to be recorded for later transcription. Descript, a free transcription tool was used to produce an initial Microsoft Word draft of the audio recordings. The transcript was then read and corrected by two co-authors a total of three times each. The data of the transcripts were then compared and reviewed by the co-authors and a final draft was created. The 32-item Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist was used to assist in creating an outline for the write-up of the study (Tong et al., 2007; Müller et al., 2021).

We purposely recruited University of Guyana faculty members who had to transition emergently to sessions using eLearning Platforms. The members recruited vary in expertise and represent a diverse group in terms of years of experience and academic achievements. It should be noted that no financial incentives or any other form of incentives were offered, and the participants chose to be a part of the study willingly.

3.2 Data Collection

The Data was collected by in-depth focus group discussion, which consisted of two groups the first having five participants and the other having three. The interviewer carried out pilot testing before commencing the focus group discussion so that an interview guide could be developed to assist easy flow of the questions and allow for clarification if there were any (Dema et al., 2021; Butnaru et al., 2021; Alodail, 2016). The persons involved in the pilot were not involved in the focus group discussions but were of a similar caliber to the professionals recruited later for the focus group discussion.

Verbal consent was also then taken before beginning the focus group discussion and the process commenced. The purpose of the study was restated, and the participants were given a chance to ask any questions before commencing the process. Data saturation was discussed so that the participants could understand the role of having saturation and why the questions were structured in the manner that they were (Yulianto, D. & Mujtahin, 2021; Obeidat, 2020). In the sphere of qualitative research, data saturation denotes the stage where researchers have amassed an ample volume of data to comprehensively investigate and comprehend the phenomenon under examination (Palinkas et al., 2013). Data saturation signifies that procuring more data is improbable to deliver significantly novel insights or information regarding the research subject (Yulianto, D. & Mujtahin, 2021). Open-ended questions were used to allow the participants to develop their answers and they were not interrupted during their discussions. Questions regarding their perceptions, approaches, knowledge regarding emergency remote online learning platforms as well as online learning platforms, student affairs, and suggestions for improvement in relation to their eLearning classes were engaged and further developed throughout the discussion. The interviews were recorded using Zoom's specialized features and were later transcribed by the author for thematic content analysis.

Table displaying the Scientific Rigor of the study.

Criteria	Strategies
Accountability	A short introduction was provided to all the participants before the interviews. In-depth, focus group discussions were conducted over a period of two weeks that lasted between 30-40 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the interviewer on the same day.
Dependability	The study was developed from its early stages through a search of existing research and literature that was systematically carried out. The interview questions were the same for all in-depth focus group discussions. A review of the transcript was done to correct any errors and all the data was coded manually and was checked three times and rechecked by two co-authors.

Confirmability	Triangulation of the data source was done using the data collection tool and the data was checked again by the co-authors.
Transferability	Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in the research process and in-depth focus group discussions were carried out until data saturation was achieved.

3.3 Data Analysis

The audio files were converted into Word document transcripts using software called Descript. However, significant editing was needed to ensure that the documented information matched what was said on the recordings. The transcripts were proofread three times by two of the authors and were subsequently annotated to assist in thematic content analysis.

Demographics were recorded prior to starting the interview and were displayed using measures of central tendencies (means and frequencies) (Tong et al., 2007; Müller et al., 2021). To allow for inter-coder reliability, one co-author was engaged and assisted in reviewing the transcripts to ensure that the information matched what was said in the recording. This process was carried out twice by a co-author as well as the chief author. The coding from them was done entirely by the chief author. The chief author then scrutinized the text to identify broad themes, then sub-themes were identified inductively. Inductive identification relied only on what evidence there was in the transcript to support the theme. The finalized themes were then rechecked to ensure that they were consistent with the findings of the transcript and further deviant checking was done. In qualitative research, "deviant checking" is a methodology employed to bolster the integrity and trustworthiness of research findings. This approach entails actively searching for and scrutinizing cases or occurrences that exhibit variances or discrepancies from the established patterns, themes, or trends discerned during data analysis. Researchers purposefully concentrate on these non-conforming or distinctive instances to gain deeper insights into their attributes and to safeguard against undue influence on research conclusions from the predominant or typical cases (Tong et al., 2007; Müller et al., 2021). Deviant checking was done to identify the limitations of the data so that no assumptions made were unsupported by data (Estrellan et al., 2021). No deviant data was identified, and the final transcripts were shared with the participants for confirmation. The data was then coded with unique identifiers to protect the participants and ensure confidentiality. The analyses carried out utilized Microsoft Office software, namely Word and Excel.

3.4 Data Analysis- Thematic Content Analysis

Table 1- Thematic Content Analysis

Themes	Sub- Themes	Codes	
1. eLearning status prior to COVID-19	1.1 Prior e-learning platform skills	1.1.1 Limitations	
		1.1.2 Opportunities	
	1.2 Traditional approaches	1.1.3 Choice of approach	
		1.2.1 Established norms	
		1.2.2 Infrastructure	
2. Post-COVID-19 Emergent eLearning platform response	2.1 Response to Emergent Platforms	2.1.1 Emergency response	
		2.1.2 Poor preparation	
	2.2 Teaching methods	2.1.3 Lack of Skill	
		2.1.4 Increased Workload	
	2.3 Assessment methods	2.2.1 Ease of access to content	
		2.2.2 Participatory Learning	
		2.2.3 Interactive Learning modalities	
		2.2.4	
	2.4 General Experience	2.3.1 Open book tests	
		2.3.2 Moodle quizzes and tests	
		2.3.3 Exam soft tests	
		2.3.4 Research projects	
		2.3.5 Presentations	
		2.3.6 Forum Discussions	
		2.3.7 Higher Order Learning	
	2.4.1 Previous eLearning platform experience	2.3.8 Integrity of Assessments	
		2.3.9 Student issues	
		2.4.1 Previous eLearning platform experience	
		2.4.2 Lack of experience with eLearning platform	
	3. Long-term complications	3.1 Accessibility to devices and the internet	3.1.1 Lecturer accessibility to devices and internet
			3.1.2 Student accessibility to devices and internet
3.1.3 Social Dilemmas			
3.2 Health and lifestyle changes			
		Social effects	
3.3 Permanent integration of eLearning at the University of Guyana		3.2.1 Sedentary associations	
		3.2.2 Social implications	
		3.2.3 Emotional connection with work for both students and lecturers	
		3.2.4 Health dilemmas	
		1.3.1 Hybrid Learning Environment	

4. Future Undertakings	4.1 Training	4.1.1 Accessibility to training opportunities
	4.2 Curriculum development	4.2.1 Curriculum development to incorporate eLearning services
	4.3 Research	4.3.1 Practices should be informed by empirical evidence. 4.3.1 Curriculum developments should engage education specialists. 4.3.2 More research should be undertaken, and the findings disseminated among the faculty. 4.3.3 Research concerning student perspectives should be undertaken
	4.4 Hybrid approaches	4.4.1 eLearning has now reserved a permanent role. 4.4.2 Considerations need to be made for practical courses. 4.4.3 Constructive conversation needs to be undertaken immediately to offset current limitations

Table 2 -Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Year of Practice	Status of profession
I1	M	33	Mixed	11	Masters
I2	M	46	African	6	Masters
I3	M	61	African	30	PhD
I4	M	27	East Indian	3	Bachelor's
I5	M	33	African	10	PhD
I6	F	30	African	4	Masters
I7	M	52	African	1	PhD

Table 3- Participant Characteristics

Variable	Values
Age	Number #
Mean	38.8
SD	12.5
Range	27- 61
Sex	Number #
Male	6(75%)
Female	2(25%)
Highest Academic Achievement	Number#
PhD	3
Master's	4
Bachelors	1

Years of Tertiary Experience	Value in years
Mean	8.75
SD	9.2
Range	1-30
Prior eLearning Use	Number#
Often/very often	2
Sometimes	6
Rarely	0
Never	0
Information Communication Technology Skills As per Interview	Number#
Advanced	
Intermediate	0
Basic	5
Novice/non-existent	3
	0

4. Discussion

The Major themes explored in the thematic analysis revolve around the prior status of the University of Guyana relative to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergent implementations to follow. It must be noted that these implementations were necessary to ensure that higher education in Guyana continued to meet the demands and needs of our country and in doing so the University entered a state of immediate evolution. The status of the University after the eLearning platforms were undertaken was considered and reflected most of the themes and the sub-themes that were derived from the discussion. The discussion put forward many concerning factors that require further quantification, some of these were, the increased workload associated with online learning modalities, the short-term and long-term effects on learning as well as health and other social tenets of the educational process. It was articulated that the evolutionary process undertaken emergently is also one that is here to stay and in and of itself beckons research to provide empirical evidence to inform more efficiency in using eLearning services.

4.1 eLearning Status prior to COVID-19

It was found that the participants noted that prior to the emergent response needed at the University, traditional approaches seemed to take the fore. As such there were many limitations in adopting eLearning platforms except for those lecturers who were well-versed in using platforms like Moodle. Having access to eLearning platforms absent its use, confers that eLearning platforms were available but were not being used due to the accepted norms of the traditional classroom approach.

I2 “Um, if you look at it in the context of the University of Guyana and, um, the Moodle, um, platform, something that started before the pandemic, but it isn’t, it’s not being used, widely used prior to the pandemic, but now, um, that the pandemic has actually caused things to change. Um, this, this, I think, um, platform is something that, um, students and lecturers have not had time to grapple with.”

I1 “And, so what happened, what I have is, well, COVID came and sort of forced everyone to go online, force, everyone to go online. Some of us were already online, but some of us, the few who were online, we sort of had a smile on our face. Because there were ones who were like Moodle is not good Moodle don’t do this or Moodle do that. A lot of talk about that.”

4.3 Post-COVID-19 Emergent eLearning Platform Response

eLearning platforms were implemented emergently to offset both time lost due to the pandemic and its constraints and to allow higher education in the country to resume. This was a difficult situation because a lot of lecturers were forced to transition quickly. This saw an initial increase in their workload and provided them with the challenge of learning to adopt new skills at a fast rate. For others who seemed to already be utilizing online platforms, the transition seemed to be easier. Prior to COVID-19, there was a lot of resistance to adopting these interfaces.

I2 “So that is, um, one, um, and the second thing I want to say with regard to the first question it came, it came, and, um, it created some kind of mixed reaction, with much apprehension on the part of certain persons, especially those persons who are not technologically savvy, but nonetheless, despite all the odds, it is a system and it's a platform that is to be utilized so that the instructional program could continue.”

I2 “I believe that, um, the virtual learning platform is necessary given the fact that we live in a technological world and, um, COVID-19 hastened this push towards technology and learning about technology.”

I4 “I prefer to use the different environment because, um, in one way the traditional environment has its advantages. Then at the same time, there are some things about the online environment that, that seems to be better, what can be done better than, um, than if it were to be done in the traditional face-to-face environment. “

I4 “In the online environment, if a student wants you to elaborate more or brings up a question, um, out of the things that you've prepared for, or you want to elaborate more, you can always pull up, um, a graphing calculator, some other online resource, very easily show the students from there.”

I1 “And, so what happened, what I have is, well, COVID came and sort of forced everyone to go online force, everyone to go online. Some of us were already online, but some of us, the few who were online, we sort of had a smile on our face. Because there were ones who were like Moodle is not good Moodle don’t do this the university Moodle do that. A lot of talk about that.”

I7 “I do believe that many individuals and I heard it, probably those individuals who would have been in teaching for a very long time, uh, find it very, very difficult and challenging to adapt. And so that in itself poses, tremendous challenges, not only for the student, but for the teacher as well.”

4.4 Established Norms

The university faculty and students constantly travel for meetings and classes on campus. It was stated that with the advent of eLearning platforms, the costs for travel have significantly reduced, and as such these funds could be allocated towards better internet access options and devices.

I7 “If I were still operating in the traditional way I would have spent so much of money on gas, um, in my vehicle, um, probably more time out of the home, um, spending two, three hours in traffic, which they've tried the online platform is advantageous in that respect.”

4.4 Infrastructure

Reducing costs for travel and room and board associated with traditional settings allows in part for access to higher education by simply acquiring internet resources and internet access devices.

I7 “They are now able Um, to access education via online, because it would have been so difficult for them to probably rent a home in central Georgetown or travel a far distance, this, but even though they are in the far-flung areas, they still have an opportunity to, to login. Even though sometimes it is the, the internet is kind of fluctuating.”

4.5 Opportunities

While the COVID-19 ushered in emergent changes it did allow for some opportunities and an understanding to be had that online learning is not a novel approach to learning. It rather, has just been sluggishly implemented in certain institutions (Garg, 2020).

I3 “There are many universities that were delivering online degrees, online degrees, wasn't anything new, and one of the issues is that persons have scant regards for online learning. I think this is still one of the issues now that persons' opinions is that online teaching it is not as good.”

I3 “We designed a lot of classrooms and now certainly we will see that we don't even need this classroom, what we really need are our spaces for practicals, um, which, um, because at the end of the day, you know, particularly in the medical sciences, that if you have the theoretical component, which can be delivered collectively, um, and in the comfort of your home and also, um, there is a practical component, which you have to do, some amount of it has to be done face to face.”

4.6 Long-Term Complications

It was stated that some lecturers found that functioning in the online environment requires an entirely different approach to teaching. The limitations that arise have much to do with how the classroom is experienced in that the interaction with students is difficult to achieve and that it requires new approaches to ensure that the student's attention is kept.

I1 “So I think it is very good to answer your second question, right? Regarding the traditional classroom, you cannot be the same person. You cannot be the same person teaching in front of the class versus the one that is teaching online.”

I3 “And so even though, um, the online platform can create opportunity for breakout rooms and all of that, but it is not as, as, as interactive as, as it should be. And I think that is one of the things which we will need to work on because we want to, we should try to make the platform as workable as, as, um, as interactive as possible.”

I3 “One of the things I have noticed, sometimes the students are not even there, you know, you, um, they sign in, when you call the names, it takes, it takes some time for them to respond and it's often. And so apart from having bandwidth, bandwidth issues, it is also sometimes the students just log in.”

I1 “So, while I can have my classes at 6:00 AM in the morning, right? Or 9:00 PM at night on the water, on a plane, I'm not too sure that my overall productivity has increased because I am suddenly thrown into this environment where I am now in meeting, some meetings, that person was able to have lasted four or five hours, now lasted close to 7, 8, 9 hours.

In addition, that sometimes as recent as last week, 10 hours, 10 hours. So, I am unsure here what to say. I know that I'm more exhausted than I was in class, and it wasn't actually physical. So, I'm more exhausted in terms of the student learning outcomes. That's also more difficult to see, because again, it depends on who you speak to."

4.7 Student accessibility to devices and internet

Guyana while at the peak of its internet technological innovations is still struggling to provide access to the internet in certain parts and as a result some students in far flung areas are struggling to gain access.

I3 "Um, the students are located across the country, um, or internet, um, nationally. Yeah, it is not as robust as it should be. Um, um, not many students can afford to have Wi-Fi. They have to depend on data, and it could affect the quality of the interaction that would have taken place in a face-to-face."

4.8 Future Undertakings

Several things come to mind when considering future undertakings to improve the system that is currently in place. More research and training are an overarching theme that tends to present. Lecturers more geared to traditional support require additional training to assist them in acquiring the skills necessary to be successful in their classrooms. The curriculum was also mentioned and as it is an evolving concept it must be approached in such a manner that is transformative for both the University and its beneficiaries. Such undertakings require guidance from empirical evidence and scientific data.

*I3 "I think. We need to reassess our assessment goals. Examsoft and the university on a whole, will be a platform that allows for a more credible exam. Having said that I think one of the issues is that our tests are not linked to our course objectives and are not impactful or right. As such our tests are not reflective of what we had aspired to teach or assess. And so, um, when you're building a curriculum, when you're building a program, um, you know, the school of medicine and the MBBS, *name of person*, she did such a great job put together a curriculum that is linked to, um the health issues, and you know you linked to the learning outcomes."*

I1 "So when you come to class, it's just a matter of discussing the notes instead of me actually, Lecturing on about content for one hour or two hours. Hopefully, it works in the future. And this sort of quasi experiment they did last semester did not reveal the results. One of the things that students have complained to me about, and I'm not too sure how we can handle it, is that they themselves have felt the workload has increased. They themselves have felt the workload increased and is preached to them."

I8 "We should try to make discussions more meaningful to engage students and maintain their focus. I have implemented this in my classroom, and it has proven to be effective. The majority of the students actively participated in discussions. For students who missed a class session due to technological issues, they were given the opportunity to contact the lecturer and seek further explanation outside of class time (office hours). For those of them who missed exams as a result of technological issues, they were offered oral exams at a predetermined date. Students that were unable to conduct their presentations were advised to submit a recording instead."

4. Conclusion

COVID-19 saw the University of Guyana to a point where it needed emergent changes to allow for higher education to continue in Guyana. The initial implementation and use of eLearning platforms saw lecturers in a peculiar state, some were better prepared than others, but nevertheless, the new platform came with overwhelming challenges for others. It is important to note that while the challenges were many, there were opportunities to be had. Lecturers were able to rise to the occasion and undertake learning initiatives that would help to see them deliver their courses successfully in the months following COVID-19's arrival in Guyana. While the lecturers interviewed believe that the new platform is here to stay, there is still much apprehension about how this will be implemented. As such, suggestions were made for more research and training, and for protocols to be developed based on empirical evidence that would meet the needs of both the lecturers and the University's beneficiaries, the students. There was overwhelming reflexivity on the part of the lecturers who participated in the focus group discussions. The lecturers were in support of receiving assistance through training and were liberal and open to experiencing new protocols to help them adapt to the new learning environment. Their support for receiving assistance is especially important because online modes of teaching and learning are estimated to remain here after COVID-19. It is important to note that for programs where practical experience is important for the acquisition of skills, there still needs to be a pertinent discussion regarding hybrid approaches to assist in making these programs more fluid in their curriculum objectives. Given the advent of artificial intelligence, it is also imperative that lecturers and educationists embark on discussions regarding the use of this type of technology in the educational setting.

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