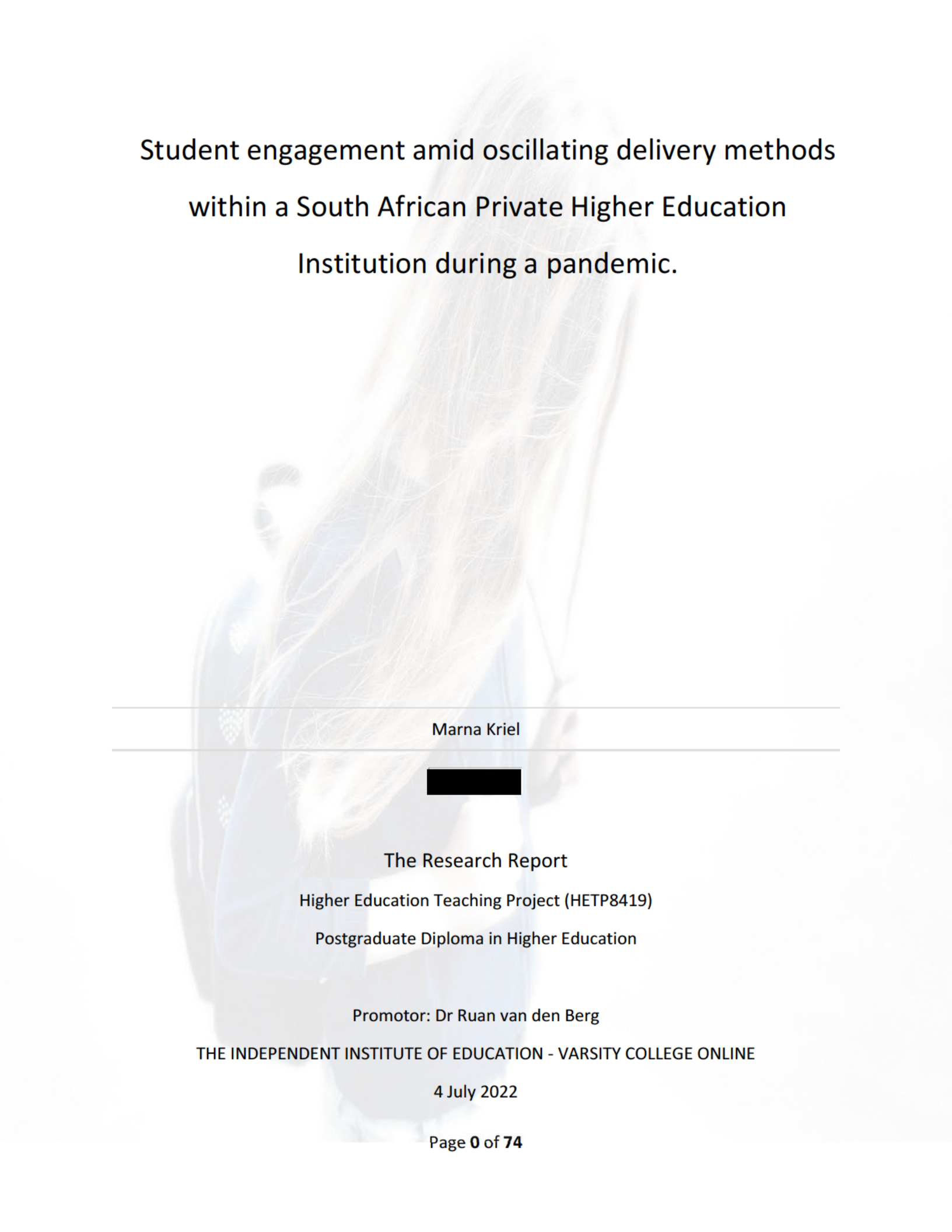
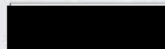




Student engagement amid oscillating delivery methods within a South African Private Higher Education Institution during a pandemic.

Marna Kriel



The Research Report
Higher Education Teaching Project (HETP8419)
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Promotor: Dr Ruan van den Berg

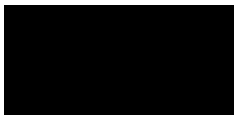
THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION - VARSITY COLLEGE ONLINE

4 July 2022

Declaration

I, Marna Kriel, student number [REDACTED], hereby declare that the research report submitted for the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education to The IIE/Varsity College Online is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a degree. I also declare that the electronic copy is a true and accurate reflection of the hard copy.

- All sources have been referenced according to the IIE version of the Harvard Reference System,
- Data and findings were collected, and documented ethically.



Signature

Date: 4 July 2022

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“Trust the Process!”

Inge Olga Economou

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a whole new dimension to face-to-face Higher Education in South Africa through emergency measures of migrating students to Emergency Remote Learning environments to preserve health and continue the academic discourse. In this Exploratory research, the Qualitative approach focused on student engagement, personal stories and how students experienced the fluctuation between face-to-face and Emergency Remote platforms. Using the Community of Inquiry to inform the theoretical framework, data was collected through focus groups and interviews, through non-probability, voluntary and spontaneous snowball sampling, capturing textual data, which was analysed through thematic coding. The most significant finding in this study was that participants did not realise the effect of the social presence and how much they needed social interaction, especially in a face-to-face context. Time management was another major theme, where students preferred having their schedules, being able to rest, and cutting down on commute and travelling costs. The emotional and psychological theme was primarily due to students being socially isolated, falling into mental health difficulties, or having to assist family members. The need for psychological support seems to go deeper than previously thought. A leniency hybrid delivery mode due was recommended for flexibility, time management, fewer time spending on commute, and limiting travelling cost.

Keywords

COVID-19, Community of Inquiry (CoI), Teaching presence, Social presence, Cognitive presence, Emergency Remote Teaching Learning and Assessment (ERTLA), Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), Student Engagement, Student Experience, Higher Education, Psychological support.

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Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease, pandemic (SARS-CoV-2)
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ERTLA	Emergency Remote Teaching Learning and Assessment
FG1P1	Focus Group 1 Participant 1 (applied to all focus group participants)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IP1	Interview Participant 1 1 (applied to all interview participants)
ICT	Information Communications Technology
LMS	Learner Management System
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution

1. Introduction to the Study

1.1. Background

On March, 27 of 2020, President Cyril Ramaposa declared a state of disaster in South Africa due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Government Gazette, 2021). COVID-19 is a highly infectious respiratory disease that “spread rapidly around the world, causing large numbers of human fatalities, destabilising the world’s strongest and weakest economies, and severely restricting the movements of global populations through lockdown, social distancing and travel restrictions” (De Groot and Lemanski, 2020:255). Mhlanga and Moloi (2020) refer to the origin of the disease from a laboratory in Wuhan City in China, disrupting daily life. According to De Groot and Lemanski (2020), initial lockdown restrictions within the South African context allowed movement for essential activities such as food replenishment and travel for medical reasons; personal hygiene was encouraged along with social distancing and wearing of masks. Yet, the full impact on immediate and long-term lives was yet to be quantified.

Mhlanga and Moloi (2020) mention the interruption caused in the academic year due to the initial closures of schools and universities and, therefore, the recommended rollout of virtual platforms to attempt to continue with the academic year. Since declaring a state of disaster in South Africa, The Minister of Higher Education, Dr BE Nzimande, MP, determined that educational institutions could successfully complete the 2020 academic year through risk-adjusted strategies during the various levels of lockdown (Government Gazette, 2021). Part of the risk-adjusted strategies included the migration to Emergency Remote Teaching, Learning and Assessment (ERTLA), which will be discussed later in this paper. Lockdown levels were adjusted as the need arose throughout 2020 and 2021 to ensure that students could complete each academic year. Creating a fluctuation between face-to-face delivery methods and ERTLA, the age-old challenge of student engagement emerged from the ashes.

1.2. Problem statement

Students enrolled at the beginning of 2020 into face-to-face learning institutions to provide them with the service of contact classes, attending classes physically and receiving their information and communication as such, even in blended classrooms and combined technology classes.

However, COVID-19 changed the scene as the lives of all people became a commodity to preserve and education needed to adjust to ERTLA.

This study investigated the student experience of ERTLA; however, a study done by Lafleur et al. (2021) has found that students have positive and negative feelings about ERLTA. Many students complained about feeling a sense of social isolation, work overload, and various complaints about digital platforms and technological support. The positive remarks were mainly about autonomous time management. However, with the initial migration to ERLTA, lecturers struggled to adapt to a new teaching environment with courseware that, in some cases, might not fit the online profile or even suffered technological difficulties.

This study focused on students within their fluctuating learning environments and aimed to better understand the perspectives and experiences of those affected.

1.3. Research question and objectives

1.3.1. Research Question

How did oscillating delivery methods between face-to-face and ERLTA affect student engagement with undergraduate students who enrolled for face-to-face courses during 2020 and continued fluctuating delivery methods during 2021?

1.3.2. Objectives

The objectives of this study were to uncover each student's story, experiences, and preferences. Therefore, each student who participated in the research study were invited to share their personal experience and what they have lived through since 2020. Rogers (1946) listed a person-centred approach investigating participants' deep expressions and attitudes; through speech, they have explored their own reactions and brought them to some realisations by verbalising their thoughts and having comprehensible conscious understandings and clearer defined perceptions of themselves. This approach ties in with the research theory in 3.5.5. Research Theory on Phenomenology and Roger's Humanistic Approach.

The impact on participants' physical, emotional, and psychological level was sampled in support of Rogers' (Kim, Joseph & Price, 2020) connection to person-centred theory. In their article, Kim

et al. (2020) delved into relational depth and how consistent positive psychological support influenced high levels of transparency, articulating core concerns and issues, and reciprocating acknowledgements. Klepac Pogrmilovic et al. (2021) stated that mental health issues are less likely to occur in students when attaining tertiary education due to skills such as reasoning, emotional self-regulation, knowledge, and interactional abilities; all vital for good health.

In the process to obtain the objectives set out in this section, questions presented in the Interview Schedule (Annexure D) produced the opportunity to identify not only themes but similarities, dissimilarities, and uncommunicated feelings the participants themselves did not even realise they felt.

Therefore, the objective was to analyse the data effectively to provide appropriate recommendations to the PHEI, to assist with the necessary understanding and support, and to enable the PHEI to close the feedback loop. Providing feedback to the whole student body would be valuable since many methods of closing the feedback loop could be utilised. The researcher did, however, experience that using email might not be the most effective method of communication, since the response on emails were very limited.

It might be worth opening the platform for dialogue. The importance of dialogue is crucial, as students voice themselves; in turn, the institution should close the feedback loop with answers and proper reasons for the institution's decisions. Both parties must recognise that improvement and change will be an ongoing process. Lygo-Baker et al. (2019) state that it is essential for an institution to both listen to and value the views students express about their learning.

1.4. Purpose and aims for this study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and scrutinise the phenomenon of student engagement that third-year students at a specific PHEI have experienced since 2020. This study was thus aimed to uncover the gaps in understanding the effect delivery method fluctuations brought to student engagement and the influences the global pandemic had on student engagement, educational experiences, and mental health.

Reflecting on the influence and uncertainty COVID-19 brought to academia, this study aimed to discover the fundamental influences on student engagement within a group of students who have experienced face-to-face studies for their entire schooling, then 2020 partial face-to-face delivery for several weeks; from there, the sudden transition to ERTLA, continuing throughout 2021 with constant fluctuations between delivery modes. When 2022 brought back a hybrid version, students displayed mixed feelings about the delivery mode, which will be discussed later in this report.

Throughout the more recent history of academics, the literature considered that improving student achievement and student engagement has been framed as a phenomenon, widely discussed, viewed, and analysed (Christenson, Reschly and Wylie, 2012). A phenomenon is described by Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) as something worth investigating and inquiring further to enable the researcher to obtain specific answers to specific questions.

Students found themselves in a situation of migrating from face-to-face classes to ERTLA, dependent on lockdown rules and regulations. The fluctuations influenced their engagement, and rightfully so, but did institutions fully understand its impact on students?

1.5. Rationale of study

This study investigated student engagement as a whole and what it represented. It further explored student engagement in face-to-face classrooms, with a brief overview of general blended learning in the face-to-face classroom setting. Research by Lafleur et al. (2021), on student engagement in ERTLA shed light on the differences between face-to-face, online and ERTLA classrooms, displayed in table 1. The importance of integrated approaches and layout within lesson plans to facilitate ERTLA classroom environments.

Studies in traditional face-to-face education indicated that student engagement contributed to student success (Kahu, 2013). Rivers and Willans (2013) narrowed down student engagement to two principal areas: firstly, the improvement of students' motivation to engage in learning and learn independently, and secondly, the participation and quality enhancement resulting in the advancement of educational experiences.

Instability and uncertainty within emergency educational measures have brought forward a field of study within student engagement, which did not exist previously. Not only did the nature of engagement affect student achievement, as Nkomo and Daniel (2021) pointed out, but technology played an essential role in student engagement and learning. These two worlds collided during the state of disaster; education was infused with digital transformation because of COVID-19 and related restrictions on movement, gatherings and education (Mhlanga and Moloi, 2020).

1.6. Ethical process

Students were invited to participate in focus groups through an email sent through the Learner Management System (LMS), actioned by the PHEI. After the third recurrent email in a timeframe of three weeks, only two students engaged with the researcher in respective interview sessions. The researcher decided to change consent documents from the originally planned focus group sessions to interview sessions.

Throughout the process, students were free and willing participants who gave informed consent for the use of the information and stories shared. Realising that a population of two students would not be enough to draw adequate data from, the researcher decided to visit the Campus 1 and Campus 2 in-person and asked students if they would like to volunteer to participate in the study; they have already received information on per email. At the first campus, five students said they had time at that moment and engaged in a focus group session which lasted hours longer than required. They requested to continue because they enjoyed being able to voice their opinions and experiences. At the second campus, the researcher was requested to speak about further studies before inviting students to participate in either a focus group or an interview session. Students arrived sequentially, one focus group and three interviews derived from the invitation extended in-person. Participants were also allowed to withdraw at any moment.

In some instances, students were quoted verbatim. Maree (2011) uttered a point that a brief explanation, even a quote, would only be partial to the depth of the meaning of the participant's words. However, a quote left more of an impression on the findings rather than elaborate explanations from the researcher alone.

Participants were provided with consent forms for both using of the use of information and recording of the session, which they had signed prior to the focus group (Annexures B1 and C1) or interview sessions (Annexures B2 and C2). Participants also received the interview schedule (Annexure D) in preparation for the sessions, although they admitted not even opening the document. Therefore, the researcher guided participants through each question within each of the respective sessions. Please see Annexures B1, B2, C1, C2 and D.

Specifics to student information, for example, specific subjects, courses, and lecturers will not be disclosed. In the case where the topics above were identified, thematic coding was used for analysis.

Information from participants who were willing to participate in either the focus groups or interviews was handled with confidentiality and will be discussed in more detail in point 4. Data analysis and findings.

The sessions recorded were transcribed by the researcher. Recordings were downloaded and kept in a password-protected folder. The data was used for the purpose of this research paper only.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

Throughout the focus group and interview sessions, it became clear that generalising results and findings in all aspects would not be honouring to the participants. In many studies it is a straightforward part of the process, however, as the research theory will also explain in 3.5.5. Research Theory, each participant's perspective and experience is different to the next. The Research Theory will be discussed in more detail in the Research Methodology section.

There are a few limitations to the study, one which involved the limit of a cross-sectional study, which means that sampling happened only once, there was no opportunity to follow up with students as their delivery methods changed and how they experienced the changes at each interval of their educational experience. Therefore, there was no opportunity to measure any changes of perspective.

A limitation that emerged during the focus group and interview sessions was a measure of support, some students needed intervention into their circumstances. As researcher, support is not possible to offer, even though there are major concerns in some of the circumstances revealed at these sessions. Some students mentioned that they are ashamed of their circumstances and did not feel comfortable sharing with their lecturers or campus support staff to seek out assistance.

Due to the size and time constraint of this study, other avenues, such as lecturer perspectives, was not explored. Lecturers may have another perspective on what they perceived from individual students as well as different student groups. The researcher identified this as a point of interest for further study.

1.8. Exposition

The exposition of this study can be summarised as exploratory research of the student engagement phenomenon amid the oscillation of delivery methods which was brought forth due to the emergency measures and risk-adjusted strategies as described in the Government Gazette (2021) implemented by the South African government on institutions of education (De Groot and Lemanski, 2020), specifically focusing on Private Higher Education (Mhlanga and Moloi, 2020). Pre COVID-19, research defined student engagement comprehensively, which will be unpacked in the literature review.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to the literature

The exploratory study led to the investigation of the phenomena which inquired into student engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, questioning the influence on student engagement amid the oscillation of delivery methods, face-to-face versus ERTLA. The researcher interrogated literature on each aspect of the title entailed; student engagement, delivery methods and ERTLA and a few education frameworks, which led to a well-known educational framework, the Community of Inquiry (CoI), which informed the theoretical framework and backbone of this study.

2.2. Conceptualisation and definitions

2.2.1. Conceptualisation

The conceptualisation of this study developed during the course of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Student engagement has been in the scope of the educational study for many years. Student engagement became a point of interest, especially during the time when the emergency measures influenced students through constant fluctuations in delivery methods. The researcher worked with institutional surveys in the past, which informed the conceptualisation of the study of student engagement within emergency measure times. This study focused on tertiary education at a particular Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI), where students did not face the extremities of inequity, students enrolled for one in a variety of contact courses presented at this specific PHEI within South Africa. Please view the concept documents stipulating aspects of the study by viewing Annexure A.

2.2.2. Definitions informing the study:

“Blended classrooms” use various instruction methods, including web-based course material, collaboration software (Valiathan. 2002), a flipped-classroom approach, and practice-based learning in a contact classroom.

“Contact classes, similar to “face-to-face learning”, is the traditional classroom where students attend class in person (College SA, nd.).

“COVID-19” is a highly infectious respiratory disease that “spread rapidly around the world, causing large numbers of human fatalities” (De Groot and Lemanski, 2020:255)

“Defer” or “deferment” is a process that one applies for where you are allowed delay one's studies for a semester or an academic year (USC, nd.)

“Emergency Remote, Teaching, Learning, and Assessment” (ERTLA) emerged as a new term to differentiate from the term online education, which existed prior to the pandemic (Ibacache, Koob and Vance. 2021).

A “Feedback loop” in this context allows academic institutions to provide feedback to students, to show students that their feedback was valuable and how the institution plans to address matters raised (Explorance. 2021).

“Learner Management System” (LMS), in the context of this particular PHEI, the LMS is an online system providing an outline of the student’s profile, access to their calendar detailing their timetable, course materials, providing a platform for online submissions, a portal to view their results and attendance and have access to financial status. The LMS system also allows the PHEI to send out emails to any student group of their choice as a form of communication. Policies and Procedures are also in a localised space on the LMS (Student Handbook, 2022).

“Information and Communications Technology” (ICT) is often seen as a synonym for Information technologies; however, ICT is considered a technology tool for communication (Techopedia, 2020).

“Student retention” indicates the number of students that enrolled and managed to continue and finish their academic studies at the same institution; the student was retained by the institution (Gragg, nd.).

2.3. Higher Education in South Africa

Since 1994, the new democratic government started to build a new education and training system aimed at changing unemployment, poverty and other social-economic challenges (DHET, 2013). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is the governing body responsible for tertiary education and vocational training in South Africa (Mhlanga and Moloi, 2020).

Due to South Africa’s sensitive political history, it was essential to note the post-Apartheid student experience. Van Zyl and Fourie-Malherbe (2021) stated that regardless of the increasing levels of students enrolling for higher education and training since 1994, the student success and throughput rates did not match the increase for the previously disadvantaged students.

Another student type to consider was the commuter student who normally travels long distances to reach their PHEI. Typically, PHEIs do not own student accommodation. Van Zyl and Fourie-

Malherbe (2021) highlighted the benefits and complications of commuter students versus residential students, which indicated that travel time, a conducive living space, safety, and a support network enhanced engagement. This is not to say that students studying at home does not have sufficient learning space, safety, and support. Still, for some students, the inclusive residential environment leaned towards a better learning experience, and for others, it did not.

It is important to note that post-Apartheid students and commuter students were not the only students under the looking glass for this study. These students were specifically mentioned, as they generally form a large population of students, and this study merely framed that student engagement includes these students, who were previously disadvantaged and excluded, within the bigger picture of the study. In 4. Data Analysis and Findings, student experiences were mentioned to frame the circumstances students had, specifically looking at the fluctuation of delivery methods but also how intricately woven their personal circumstances and educational experience were during this time and how it affected their student engagement.

The central theme for this study was student engagement, which is discussed below in 2.4. Student Engagement as well as sub paragraphs.

2.4. Student Engagement

“Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.” (Trowler, 2010:3)

Looking at the student sitting in the classroom, it was crucial to remember the historical background of where they all come from and what still affected them. Looking at two students, one may come from a wealthy home and the other lives in an informal settlement. Resources, home environments, psychological support and schooling may have been worlds apart. Influential factors of student success sparked interest in further research on local students as Wawrzynski, Heck and Remley (2012:109) implied “precollege attributes and characteristics, family background and prior schooling” might have been the factors influencing student success.

2.4.1. History

The history of student engagement in higher education literature has roots in many countries long before it reached South African soil—American researchers, Pace and Astin, seemed to be the forefathers to student engagement. According to Wawrzynski, Heck and Remley (2012:106) and Trowler (2010), student engagement was “a concept originating from Pace’s (1982) measures of quality of effort and Astin’s (1985) theory of involvement.”.

No significant research was done on student engagement and success during the Apartheid regime. Wawrzynski et al. (2012) mentioned that student engagement within South African Higher Education is relatively new in literature, which suggested some differences in student engagement during Apartheid and post-Apartheid, but not enough to have drawn comparisons between the two.

2.4.2. Definition

Literature does not seem to provide an exact meaning or definition on student engagement (Rivers and Willans. 2013). However, the boundaries of student engagement appear to encapsulate multiple aspects of student behaviour, psychological and physical attributes of attention.

Christenson, Reschly and Wylie (2012) referred to the types of engagement as emotional, cognitive and behavioural, branching out on each type. Christenson et al. (2012) disapproved of scholars who used the terms motivation and engagement interchangeably, as Christenson et al. (2012:14) consider that “motivation represents intention” and had existed in literature for a long time. In contrast, engagement was relatively new and is defined as “action” (Christenson et al., 2012:14).

According to Lygo-Baker et al. (2019), student engagement was concerned with representation, feedback, involvement in curriculum design, and learning activities, whereas Vallee (2017) stated that other researchers believed engagement came from motivational literature, throughput literature, and school reform’s general discourse.

Kahu (2013) stated four distinct approaches: behavioural, psychological, sociocultural and holistic perspectives. Maguire, Egan, Hyland and Maguire (2016:2) supported the multidimensional nature of engagement: “academic, behavioural, cognitive and affective”, in their study, they investigated the effect a student’s Emotional Intelligence¹ had on their student engagement.

Student engagement has many facets and describing it in a single definition will always be challenging due to the variations of what it actually entails. However, the researcher defined student engagement loosely by culminating the phrases above. Within Higher Education, student engagement is the physical, cognitive and psychological participation in academics and social environments within the academic context. Bear in mind that student engagement is much more complex than this statement and can be defined more comprehensively on multiple levels to illustrate the deeper meaning and classification thereof.

2.4.3. Difference in delivery modes

Considering student engagement in different delivery modes, it was crucial to understand that there was a difference between student engagement of students who studied face-to-face and online students. Students who studied face-to-face courses had a structured environment and a lecturer that guided them through daily routines and general external expectations, which were rarely as demanding as those of an online student. Courses are structured differently for face-to-face studies, and often more practically orientated.

Students who studied online courses do so for the flexibility that accommodates multiple responsibilities (Meyer, 2014). Students have external factors like family, work, finances, and life crises to keep in mind, academic ability versus the course demands, including the interaction between peers and the lecturer, campus, and activities (Meyer, 2014).

At this point of the study, the researcher compared specifically the engagement of face-to-face students to online students due to the research readily available to academia at this point in time. However, this study explored student engagement of face-to-face students, where students were

¹ Emotional Intelligence is described as the capacity to blend thinking and feeling or manage and understand emotions in ourselves and others. It’s being smarter with feelings (SixSeconds and Institute of Health and Human Potential, n.d.)

forced to ERTLA, navigated through a remote online environment, and adjusted to circumstances they did not choose by enrolling for a face-to-face course.

Student engagement within face-to-face, blended learning, and ERTLA classrooms will be discussed later in the literature review. In the next section, various models of engagement were discussed. Christenson et al. (2012) suggested that there were various subtype models in student engagement literature. According to Bean and Eaton (2001), numerous models and approaches were used to describe student engagement and how to improve student retention and success rates.

2.4.4. Models of Student Engagement

Regarding face-to-face research, Bean and Eaton (2001) discussed *Service-Learning* as a model that manifested in improved cognitive development, academic engagement, problem-solving skills, and more time studying. This model allowed students to persist under stress and take control of their own learning.

Learning Communities were a popular model mentioned by Bean and Eaton (2001) as a combination of social interaction and academic responsibilities. Zepke and Leach (2010b) pointed out that learning cultures needed a social boost to create a sense of belonging and dynamic relationships between peers, student-lecturer relationships, and a sense of institutional connection. Learning communities provide an academic structure within the collaboration between students and faculties (Tinto, 2001).

Another model mentioned by Bean and Eaton (2001) was *Mentoring Programs*, where students have access to peer and faculty mentors for support and information. Mentoring programs were to the advantage of a student to advance academically and socially within a relationship based on trust and communication. Validation of student strengths and perspectives contributed to the student's social self-efficacy.

Vallee (2017) suggested that student engagement adopts a *tripartite model* including cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, whereas other researchers have framed student

engagement specifically in terms of “student voice”, school relationships, democratic participation, race/ethnicity and class.

Then, Meyer (2014) described *The Community of Inquiry* (Col) model with three overlapping presences: teaching, cognitive and social. The Col model equally focused on the three presences: the *teaching presence* – a well-designed and facilitated course with clearly defined parameters and focus; the *cognitive presence* – problem exploration and resolution, through construction and reflection; and the *social presence* – interaction with other students and the course content in the form of community (Garrison and Arbaugh, 2007).

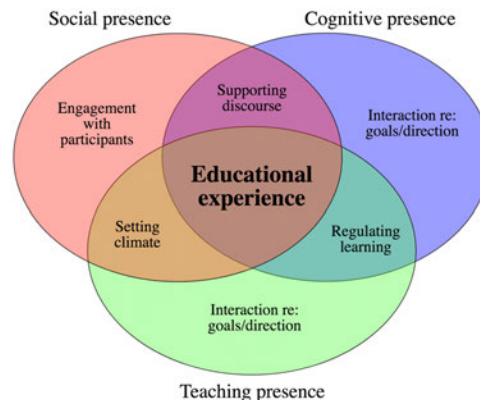


Figure 1: Community of Inquiry Framework by Matbury-Own (Witthaus, 2018).

However, from an ERTLA point of view, Patwardhan, Rao, Thirugnanasambantham and Prabhu (2020) stated within their research that Col is a popular distance education framework its applicability within ERTLA still remains under-researched. Patwardhan et al. (2020) mentioned the importance of the students’ overall learning experience within ERTLA, which could be enhanced through various avenues that still needed improvements, such as re-designing learning activities and course content and more.

The Col model fits the profile of adaptability between the oscillating delivery methods. With lesson plans to accommodate face-to-face, blended learning and ERTLA classrooms, sessions

could be adapted and arranged to encourage student engagement in all three presences: teaching, social, and cognitive. Implementing the CoI model could mean that a class environment could be stable, regardless of the delivery method.

Even with the importance of engagement models, it was essential to look at other notions that couple with student engagement. Student retention is vital to the student within an academic environment as a campus-based phenomenon, impacting life's more prominent social, economic, and political context (Berger, Blanco Ramirez and Lyon, 2012). There are essential aspects that constitute student engagement, such as student retention, and student success (Khatri and More. 2018). Student retention resulted in student success (Tinto, 2009). Some researchers believed that there was a correlation between student engagement and student success.

2.4.5. Student success rates

Tinto (2001) stated five points that influenced student success; students were more likely to persist and graduate:

In a setting that had high expectations to succeed; an institution that was clear and consistent with the information and was influential in advising about student choices; settings that provided personal, social and academic support as needed; involvement of students as valued members of the institution, with frequent and quality contact with staff and other students; fostering a learning environment.

However, often students indicated their leave without turning to professional help, with a decision already finalised and leaving without a qualification (van Zyl, 2010). Van Zyl (2010) pointed out that students were faced with three basic options between staying, transferring, or leaving the educational system. However, the option of deferring students to a consecutive year was also an option, which could fall under the 'staying' category. More often than not, students would turn to their lecturer to seek professional help before deciding to leave their studies. Due to the vital role that the lecturer played as the first point of contact with the institution, the lecturer must have been prepared to provide guidance in these scenarios.

Meyer (2014) states that a lecturer would play a crucial role in the engagement of a student by providing guidance on what was expected in projects (teaching presence) and the development of problem-solving skills (cognitive presence), which contributed to the students' educational experience. In comparison, student satisfaction related (Meyer, 2014), and learning outcomes correlated with social presence (Garrison and Arbaugh, 2007).

According to van Zyl (2010), various stakeholders were concerned with the cost connected to poor student performance. Stakeholders included student families, HEI's, and Governments; all considered the cost of non-completion, financial and personal costs. There were benefits connected to student success, for example, public or individual economic benefits.

When it came to general student retention, Yorke and Longden (2004) perceived those students indicated that they often left programmes due to the wrong choice of field of study, academic or financial difficulties, personal problems, or poor student experience. Therefore, it seemed the detachment caused students to disengage with their studies.

Tinto (2009) highlighted four conditions supportive of student success: support, feedback, expectations, and involvement. In terms of support, both academic and social support was in the form of counselling, mentoring, study groups, tutoring, and basic skill courses were necessary (Tinto, 2009). Feedback and communication from staff, lecturers, and peers were essential for connection within a classroom, information sharing and understanding in terms of academic assessment and improvement, and two-way communication (Tinto, 2009). Expectations should be clear and held high by the institution and the lecturer for students to be able to reach higher heights. Tinto (2009:4) referred to involvement as "engagement is a condition for student success" as he mentions that "the classroom may be the only place where they meet" due to work or commute. According to Tinto (2009), student success increased with classroom learning activities. Moreover, Tinto (2009:5) validated the importance that students should not merely stay but "learn in staying."

Following student success, the researcher reverted to the focus on student engagement in face-to-face and ERTLA studies. Research suggested similarities in cognitive gains across face-to-face, blended, and online learning but mixed results in behavioural and emotional engagement

(Paulsen and McCormick, 2020). In searching for the balance between face-to-face, blended learning and online learning, the three collided into the creation of ERTLA, which will be viewed in more detail at 2.4.7. Student Engagement in ERTLA.

2.4.6. Student Engagement in Face-to-Face Studies

Student engagement in the context of face-to-face studies was framed by Kahu (2013) as four approaches to engagement: behavioural, psychological, sociocultural, and holistic. For this study, the researcher summarised the four approaches of Kahu's (2013) aspects of student engagement, as all approaches had value in the global definition of student engagement.

The Behavioural perspective described a range of student behaviours like teaching practices, time on task, academic and social integration (Kahu, 2013). Mandernach's (2015) description of behavioural criteria aligned with Kahu (2013), with students who made active responses to learning tasks.

The Psychological perspective defined viewing "engagement as an internal psychosocial process that evolves over time and varies in intensity...with various overlapping dimensions of engagement...including behaviour, cognition, emotion and conation" (Kahu, 2013:5,6). Zepke and Leach (2010a) motivated that the psychological aspect of "self-belief" has a much larger impact on student performance goals and learning.

The sociocultural perspective focused on the impact of student experience and the broader social context (Kahu, 2013), including family, community, and social influences (Vallee, 2017). In the broader context of engagement, students required support from their families and the community to effectively have engaged in their studies.

Kahu (2013) mentioned that the holistic perspective was both a process (what the educational institution did) and an outcome (what the student needed to do). There must be input from both the institution and the student. The institutions had the responsibility to supply excellent and up-to-date education and activities to have provided students with the opportunity to engage and find a place to belong. The student needed to do their part by engaging in their studies, took part in some of the activities set out to enable them to succeed and finish their studies successfully.

Witkowski and Cornell (2015) motivated group work, debates, and discussions to enhance learning in the classroom.

Students needed to engage cognitively, behaviourally, and emotionally to engage in deep learning; engagement through time on task, asking questions; and having a feeling of belonging (Kahu, 2013). According to Lygo-Baker et al. (2019), research has shown that students often leave educational programmes with a lack of belonging.

Institutions with Blended Learning and technology already incorporated into their curriculum might have easily transitioned to ERTLA. But first, a brief overview on blended learning within the face-to-face context, and then 2.4.7. Student Engagement in ERTLA.

2.4.6.1. Blended Learning in the Context of Face-to-Face Learning

Blended learning took on various teaching and learning methods as face-to-face courses used digital technology and tools, accompanied by online learning activities, virtual sessions, and the incorporation of digital media (Ożadowicz, 2020; Tripathi and Tandon, 2020). Whereas a discovery by Cronje (2021) stated that the “classic definition” of blended learning should rather be blended instruction, blended learning, according to Cronje, is focused on the delivery of study materials, where instead it should be based on both learning theory and materials.

In blended classes, students seemed to be more engaged than in traditional face-to-face or web-only classes, as Tripathi and Tandon (2020) stated that the focus being more student-centric. Witkowski and Cornell (2015) suggested that using technology in the classroom with well-designed computer simulations ensures that students do not become cognitively overloaded and that game simulations result in greater student engagement. As mentioned by Meyer (2014), some use of technology may have impacted student engagement positively.

The initial change from face-to-face learning, with or without blended learning, to ERTLA brought forth a form of blended learning which focused on technology and methodology, a change that was not founded on the theory that Cronje (2021) linked to constructivism and behaviourism. Regardless of Cronje’s findings, further investigation into student engagement in ERTLA was necessary.

2.4.7. Student Engagement in ERTLA

Student engagement in the context of ERTLA or Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was different from general online learning. Saqlain (2021) stated that ERT was meant to be a temporary delivery method, requiring different teaching strategies, although it is equally important for students to actively engage in the strategies presented and have a student and lecturer assurance.

Illustrated in the table below, some of the differences were highlighted (Lafleur et al., 2021). The table includes a comparison between face-to-face learning, online, and ERTLA.

Table 1: The table was adapted from Lafleur et al. (2021:3-4). This depicted some of the differences between the three delivery modes: Face-to-face, Online and ERTLA.

Face-to-face Learning with Blended Learning	Online Learning	Emergency Remote Teaching, Learning and Assessment
Lecturers needed minimal experience with online platforms.	Lecturers had good to excellent experience with online platforms.	Lecturers may have minimal to no experience with online platforms.
Course material was written for a face-to-face delivery method with the use of blended learning tools in addition to what students were taught.	Course material was written with online delivery in mind and only allows for online teaching and learning tools for instruction.	Course material was written for a face-to-face delivery method with no planning or guidance for the use of online teaching and learning tools for instruction.
Planned and structured a face-to-face delivery method.	Planned and structured for an online delivery method.	Urgent and unplanned.
Infrastructure received suitable investment.	Platforms and infrastructure receive suitable investment.	Platforms and infrastructure may have lacked the ability to adapt to the task and might have not been budgeted for.
If necessary, there were on site Information Technology (IT) support.	The necessary Information Technology (IT) was part of the package.	The needed Information Technology (IT) support might not have been available.

Face-to-face studies were chosen by students.	Online learning was chosen by students.	ERTLA was not chosen by students.
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Regarding ERTLA, Megawati, Mukminatien, Permana, Dewi and Fitriati (2021) suggested that an integrated approach with exciting and interactive activities should have formed part of a lesson plan, with appealing materials and media in the form of graphics, presentations, videotelephony and social networking. Megawati et al. (2021) demonstrated separate lesson plans for each form of media. However, it was vital to be pre-prepared with a lesson plan for each session, having specific goals and activities built into the session's start, core, and closing. The importance of keeping to time and using the technology planned was crucial.

As previously mentioned, Cronje (2021) grounded his study on the theories of constructivism and behaviourism as the necessary foundation to success in blended learning in ERTLA through scaffolding students and then fading support as well as providing stimulus and generating a response aimed at integration. It was not particularly evident in the study that participants felt anything lacking in their learning process or course material other than lecturers repeating slides with the exact courseware and no new addition of information and passive receiving of information.

An advantage discovered during ERTLA delivery were recordings of lectures which allowed for more flexibility. Nkomo & Daniel (2021) stated that research indicated students with access to recordings of lectures indicated that they experienced enhanced learning experiences, which created a more inclusive learning environment. The participants in this study made similar remarks, students preferred to access recordings if there was something they did not understand in a lecture, and sometimes rewatching the lecture revealed missed steps in their work, which explained software difficulties without engaging with the lecturer.

Furthermore, Ibacache, Koob and Vance (2021) raised the issue of equity in ERTLA amongst the availability and access to the internet, Wi-Fi and bandwidth, and access to devices like computers and webcams. Students and lecturers alike needed to have a level of computer literacy that

promoted comfortable digital engagement. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, stress compromised the individual's situation and environment in such a manner that technical and cognitive skills necessary for effective communication, evaluation and creation were affected, finding that students in higher education were not necessarily technologically savvy (Ibacache, et al. 2021).

Each decision made in 3. Research approach and methodology were to keep in mind and value the participant's input. The study focused on exploratory research to understand the impact of oscillating delivery methods on student engagement. The researcher investigated student engagement in general terms within the literature review to draft a scope of foundational information for the study.

The study specifically looked at face-to-face students and their experience with classroom interaction and ERTLA. Their stories and experiences contributed to and determined the outcomes of this study. The value in each unique circumstance could be further explored through extensive research. COVID-19 brought a different dimension to education, ERTLA.

The technological framework and discussion of the research theory and each assumption guided the study toward the research design and methodology. Below, the theoretical framework is discussed on what informed the study from foundation to findings.

2.5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework took form as a deeper enquiry into the Rogers Humanist research theory and how it relates to the Col model (Swan et al. 2020). In comparison, McLeod (2015) described the Rogers Humanist theory as the attempt to understand human nature through methods of inquiry. Swan et al. (2020) highlighted three “core conditions” that Rogers incorporated in therapy and education, support in online human services and online courses in general: unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness. Within the study Swan et al. produced, it was found that many correlations could be drawn from the Col model by working on empathy and high levels of regard for students, and the teaching presence could be enhanced (2020).

Therefore, due to the correlation between Rogers's Humanist Theory and Col, the theoretical framework formed and became the basis for the interview schedule used in focus groups and interview sessions. The researcher sought out all three presences, teaching, social and cognitive, to determine which presence was experienced best in a particular delivery mode.

2.6. Conclusion

Student engagement became the main focus of this study while investigating the influence fluctuation of delivery methods had on the individual student. Keeping in mind that equity forms a delicate part of the investigation, but also evaluating student mental health as a component of impact on student engagement. By focusing on one model of student engagement, Col framed the study by drawing out the importance of the teaching, social, and cognitive presences in class. In contrast, students did not even realise the importance of the social presence yet was drawn to the physical interaction as soon as regulations permitted, also not realising that the short-term social interactions had long-term effects on interaction in class.

Next, the Research approach and methodology will explain the research decisions made and how they influenced the study.

3. Research approach and methodology

3.1. Research paradigm

The Interpretivism research paradigm was chosen, Okesina (2020) defined this paradigm to enable the researcher to better understand and explore the perspectives of individuals. De Vos et al. (2011) argued that an Interpretivists study influenced human behaviour in individuals. The effect occurred mainly in environments where political, social, and cultural factors impacted a person's construction and interpretation of reality (Nelson et al., 2014). Nelson et al. (2014) went further to say that Interpretivism could not be a static phenomenon and that it refined and reorganised as the individual's experiences changed. However, Thanh and Thanh (2015) described Interpretivism as an inclusive paradigm, which allowed for multiple perspectives from various individuals from various backgrounds.

3.2. Research approach

The research approach selected for this study was the qualitative research approach, which was based on an Interpretivist paradigm and described the phenomena of understanding people in their environments (Maree, 2011).

In this study, the researcher engaged verbally with participants. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) explained that participants needed to engage verbally and, if possible, visually analysed for behavioural, attitudinal, and relational interpretation. In the hand full of interviews that took place virtually, it was far more challenging to interpret the participants' behaviour and attitudes, even the way that students related to the researcher seemed to be more distant and constrained. Whereas the face-to-face sessions seemed to be more engaging, and participants seemed to feel safer opening up about their personal experiences.

3.3. Research Methodology

The research methodology was based on qualitative research approaches. In the sections below, each aspect of this study's research methodology was explained, framing the process and execution of the research study. This section includes the population, sampling, delimitations, research theory and assumptions, research design, research method, data in terms of collection, analysis, interpretation, findings, trustworthiness, and feasibility of the study.

3.3.1. Population

De Vos et al. (2011) described the population as the entire group of people. Cone and Foster (2008) motivated those participants should be identified; their involvement defined; and their selection indicated.

Participants' with more than one specific characteristic related to this particular research. The population for this study, was undergraduate students at several campuses at a specific PHEI in South Africa. These students have been subject to the fluctuations of the COVID-19 lockdown rules and regulations inflicted on the South African Higher Education industry in 2020 and 2021.

The invitation was extended to the detailed population of students that included NQF level 6 and 7 students from Diploma and Degree qualifications from all national campuses, enrolled during

the time of data collection. Although participants included in this study, were studying a Degree, NQF level 7, from Campus 1 and Campus 2.

3.3.2. Sample design and sampling methods

Non-probability sampling was the original selection for this study, along with the volunteer sampling method. At Campus 2, spontaneous snowball sampling took place when participants started motivating their peers to take part in the study.

De Vos et al. (2011) described that non-probability sampling should be used when the entire population is difficult to access, and students volunteered to participate in the data collection process. In terms of volunteer sampling, Mohsin (2016) outlined the technique as participants choose for themselves to take part in the study, while snowball sampling where participants take part in the study one at a time and then refer their peers to take part.

The process of sampling took place as follows: A few emails were sent to the population group through the PHEIs Learner Management System (LMS), stating the study's details and objectives and enabling students to make contact with the researcher through email or a booking form.

Focus groups were intended for the study as the sample size for the focus groups were to be limited to a maximum of fifteen students, with five participants per group. The initial response to the researcher's email request resulted in two separate one-on-one online interviews, and with numerous follow-up emails, two more one-on-one online interviews took place and one face-to-face interview on Campus 1. Afterwards, the researcher decided to approach students on the two closest campuses, during class time, to invite them to either a one-on-one interview or a focus group session. The researcher was fortunate to have one face-to-face focus group of five participants on Campus 1, and on Campus 2, the researcher had access to one face-to-face focus group of two students and three face-to-face interviews. Participants were provided with the necessary consent documents (Annexure B1 and C1 - focus group, or B2 and C2 - interviews) and the interview schedule (Annexure D), and the researcher explained how a session would work and defined the expectation of the participant.

3.3.3. Delimitations

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) stated that delimitations could be based on any section of the research scope; therefore, the specific delimitations below were to manage the research study and support the validity and reliability of the study.

The researcher approached a PHEI in South Africa, where students enrolled in face-to-face Undergraduate Degree and Diploma Accredited Programmes, extending an invitation to five South African Campuses (Pretoria, Midrand, Cape Town, Durban, Stellenbosch). Participants were in their final year of study, third-year (Diploma NQF level 6 and Degree NQF level 7), at the beginning of their 2022 academic year.

3.3.4. Research Theory

The researcher considered phenomenology as the anchor theory of this study. De Vos et al. (2011) defined phenomenology as a study that interpreted and gained an understanding of human behaviour according to the perspective of individuals in a particular situation within a study group. In this study, the assessment of student behaviour and psychological engagement was viewed from the student's perspective. Students' ideas were under the research scope to express their perspectives and description of their experiences and to better understand their behaviour and psychological outset towards student engagement.

Smith (2018) explained phenomenology as the study of consciousness structures as experienced from the first-person point of view, ranging from the experiences, thoughts, memory, emotion, and perception which made up the meaning of a given experience. However, McLeod (2015) stated that phenomenology is sometimes also referred to as the humanistic approach or client-centred approach, which was the research field of Carl R. Rogers. Swan et al. (2020) exclaimed the boundarylessness between psychology and education within the work of Rogers.

3.3.4.1. History of Carl R. Rogers

Carl Ransom Rogers was an American psychologist born in 1902 and died in 1987 (McLeod, 2014). Rogers was a humanistic psychologist who, according to McLeod (2014), believed that a person should be placed in the right environment to be able to develop and grow. Humanism or client-centredness formed part of what Rogers researched throughout his lifetime, focusing on self and

human-centredness. Rogers (1959) plainly states in describing his background that he got acquainted with the work of many historical researchers like John Dewey. Rogers (1959:186) continued to emphasise how much stimulation he had received through helping individuals through “the meaning of therapy, dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the structure and functioning of personality” and how he came to his systematic theories. Swan et al. (2020) mentioned that Rogers humanistic approach was convinced that the relationship between a therapist and a patient is similar to the relationship between an educator and a student.

3.3.4.2. Humanistic approach

The humanistic approach was described by McLeod (2015) as an “... emphasises looking at the whole person, and the uniqueness of each individual. Humanistic psychology begins with the existential assumptions that people have free will and are motivated to achieve their potential and self-actualise”. Mister Simplify (2020) explains that the Rogers’s humanistic theory is based on the “self-concept” which is influenced by personal perspectives, childhood, and society. The self-concept has three components: self-worth, self-image, and ideal self. When the self-image and ideal self-match, one would reach the point of self-actualisation, then a person becomes a fully functional person, which Rogers believed to be very difficult (Mister Simplify. 2020).

Ryan (2018:9) stated that phenomenology is “deeply informed by philosophical assumptions”. To further discuss aspects of phenomenology or the humanistic approach, there are various fundamental philosophical assumptions discussed in the following paragraphs:

3.3.5. Assumptions

3.3.5.1. Epistemological Assumption

Maree (2011) described epistemology as the study of knowledge of facts and truths. Interpretivism’s epistemological assumption was to gain knowledge and understanding of human behaviour (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. 2014). Furthermore, Nelson, Groom and Potrac (2014) stated that subjective evidence is constructed and based on the participant’s perspective. Nelson et al. (2014) suggested the study involved the participant and the researcher in a co-constructed, transactional, and subjective study. Maree (2011) motivated that the researcher had to spend

significant time with the participants, to establish a relationship, which would enable the researcher to understand relevant experiences.

3.3.5.2. Ontological Assumption

There were multiple perspectives which emerged from the participants, which are valid from each person's perspective. Maree (2011) observed that each individual's experience would be subjective to their unique interactions and the nature of how they experience reality. Okesina (2020) affirms that "any phenomenon has multiple realities...all knowledge is relative to the knower and can be understood from the point of view of the individual who is directly involved".

3.3.5.3. Metatheoretical Assumption

The metatheoretical assumption was based on the data collection analysis through descriptions and understanding of the participants' realities. The assumption revealed meanings and values involved in the phenomenon, which "tells a story... rich in detailed description and direct quotes from participants" (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:30). Participants would be quoted verbatim to tell their story in as much as possible detail to reveal their involvement in the phenomenon.

3.3.5.4. Methodological Assumption

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) established that the methodological assumption to be a guiding system for solving the research problems. Okesina (2020:62) affirmed that the methodology process referred to the "systematic procedures or tools used for collection and analysis of data". Creswell and Poth advised that the methodology framework should be a broader guide to assist with collecting and analysing data (2018). The suitable data collection method to enable the view through the participants' eyes was qualitative data collection. Why and how the applicable textual data shed light on humans being studied in their environment and how they perceived their circumstances and described their emotions and thoughts.

3.3.5.5. Axiological Assumption

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) explained the axiological assumption the study of values and value judgements and a "complex understanding of unique realities". Creswell and Poth (2018) asserts the nature of the study to report values and prejudice towards the information gathered; focused

on the researcher's positionality, involving social position, political, personal, and professional beliefs.

3.3.6. Research design

At this point, reviewing the research question in terms of research design:

How did oscillating delivery methods between face-to-face and ERLTA affect student engagement with undergraduate students who enrolled for face-to-face courses during 2020 and continued fluctuating delivery methods during 2021?

The literature discussed each delivery method, along with student engagement relating to the delivery method, within Higher Education. In terms of research methodology, the question was unpacked through the Interpretivist paradigm, which falls under the qualitative approach. The population was outlined as third-year students at a PHEI within South Africa, making use of non-probability and volunteer sampling as methods. The Rogers Humanist theory, which falls under phenomenology, a research theory grounded in the theoretical framework, along with the Col framework, formed the basis and framework for this study. Each assumption focussed on the interpretivism foundation, guiding the study to focus on human behaviour, the multiple realities of each individual, enabling the researcher to quote participants verbatim, applying a systematic procedure for data collection and analysis, and bringing forth findings to provide the researcher understanding to the participants' unique realities.

Within sections of the study, it was possible to draw comparisons between the levels of engagement between face-to-face and ERTLA. Comparisons become evident within the larger scope of research, and the effect of the oscillation became comparable between individuals as well. The research was not mainly focused on specific subjects, modules or lecturers. However, the researcher realised that specific topics or even courses seem to be much more suitable for virtual environments than others. Some lecturers were more adequate than others to handle the ERTLA environment, as others were more proficient in face-to-face environments.

3.4. Research method

The tools used to collect, capture, and analyse data stem from the qualitative methods, informed by the interpretivist approach. De Vos et al. (2011) discusses interpretivism under the qualitative research design as a method to understand and explain the data gained from the social interaction in either focus groups or interviews.

As previously discussed in the research methodology section, the population were undergraduate students, NQF 7 from Degree courses; regardless of the fact that a nationwide invitation was sent to all campuses at a PHEI in South Africa, only students from Campus 1 and Campus 2 responded, and therefore the researcher adjusted their data collection tool to interviews. However, when the researcher visited the campus in-person, the students responded to a focus group. Therefore, the researcher incorporated both data collection methods with a qualitative interview schedule (Please refer to detailed interview schedule, Annexure D).

Students shared their experiences and stories verbally, recorded on a virtual meeting platform. The participants were sampled through non-probability sampling and volunteer sampling. Data were captured through online recording and automatic transcription; the researcher listened to the recordings and edited the transcriptions to the correct wording. Thematic coding was used for the data analysis phase, excluding the possibility of generalisation.

3.4.1. Data collection methods

The researcher collected qualitative data, which enabled the gathering of in-depth insight into the phenomenon from the student's perspective. Thanh and Thanh (2015) argued that in educational research, the researcher usually seeks an understanding of the experiences of groups or individuals, and qualitative methods were likely to be the best method to gather information.

An introductory email was sent to the population group to draw out willing participants for focus group sessions. The email was sent through the institution's Learner Management System (LMS).

Willing participants contacted the researcher to arrange focus group sessions; due to the lack of response, there were not enough students to form a focus group, but participants had the opportunity to take part in interview sessions. When students responded to the lecturer in-

person and formed focus groups, the opportunity was permitted. Participants received the necessary consent documents beforehand to sign, with the option to withdraw at any time. Please refer to Annexures B1 and C2 (Focus group consent documents), B2 and C2 (Interview consent documents). There are two sets of consent documents, the templates attached in the Annexures were adjusted to speak to either focus groups or interview sessions.

Sessions were scheduled to be forty-five-minute online sessions. However, most of the Interview sessions and the second focus group session were about twenty to twenty-five minutes long, whereas two interview sessions were about one hour long each, and the first focus group session ended at two hours twenty minutes. These sessions were informally structured and guided by the interview schedule (Annexure D) and a PowerPoint presentation of the interview schedule.

Each participant received a number, which was used in reference uniquely to the participant. When a question was posed, each participant within a focus group would answer in numerical order, making it easier to transcribe each session and distinguish between participants. Interview sessions were also numbered to distinguish between participants.

Each session was recorded. Due to the population being spread all over South Africa, the costs involved in face-to-face focus groups would be too high for such a small study. The recordings also allow the researcher to transcribe the data afterwards. The recordings of each session were downloaded for safekeeping and saved in a password-protected folder. Lastly, the researcher led the online and face-to-face sessions as a facilitator and guided conversations to enable participants to stay on track and ensured that questions were understood and fully answered.

3.4.2. Data capturing and data editing

Recording of data through interviewing, De Vos et al. (2011), described as direct interchange with the participant, based on a social relationship.

Data were captured through online recording and automatic transcription; the researcher made use of the free versions of transcription software. Thereafter the researcher listened to the recordings and edited the transcriptions to the correct wording and punctuation.

3.4.3. Data analysis methods

Textual data analysis, according to De Vos et al. (2011) involves the interpretation of the data and not only the frequency of occurring themes. However, Thematic coding was used. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) outlines thematic coding as grouping similar information together, picking up patterns, pointing out similarities, dissimilarities and leading to data saturation as soon as there was no new information emerging from the data.

Each focus group and interview participant supplied various valid points to explore and reflect upon for future suggestions or interventions from the PHEI. The researcher transcribed the recorded sessions, which were transformed from raw information to transcribed. As previously explained, participants shared their personal experiences, which excluded the possibility of data generalisation.

3.4.4. Interpretation of data

The researcher created an Excel spreadsheet where all data was captured, participants listed in rows and questions in columns, making the analyses phase easier. A second Excel sheet was created with the codes related to the student's answers. The researcher soon started identifying themes and listed them in 4.2. Findings.

3.5. Shortcomings

The researcher discovered more recent articles, which were not yet published when the proposal was submitted; therefore, there are no specific shortcomings in terms of literature specifically to ERTLA.

The researcher found that not much research was done on the emotional and psychological impact on students.

Missing data from FG1 based on the cognitive presence question, do you understand feedback explained to me better when I am learning in a classroom/virtually? The missing data happened due to the accidental pass on the question by the researcher during the focus group session. This led to the data being unusable for analysis for this specific question.

3.6. Trustworthiness and credibility of the study

De Vos et al. (2011) pointed out that the study should be credible and authentic by accurately identifying the subject; the transferability should be indicated; dependability should be discussed; and the confirmability by confirming the study by another.

The study is credible due to the confirmation that the fluctuations in delivery methods did have an influence on participants; the results could be transferable to other, non-emergency circumstances in some way, although, the effect of major health risks due to COVID placed students in more of a stress environment; the process was well documented from the initial planning throughout the execution of data recording, capturing and analysis; many of the results are confirmed by studies that was released in 2020 and 2021.

Focus group and interview sessions allowed for more in-depth insight, although follow-up sessions in a longitudinal study would have been more valuable by evaluating changes and how it influenced participants. The cross-sectional study still increased the credibility of the study.

The researcher found that face-to-face sessions proved to be more interactive, in-depth, and comprehensive data compared to the online interviews.

Unfortunately, data collection was delayed due to the processes and procedures for ethical clearance. However, the data might have looked different if students were interviewed amidst the fluctuations, not having to rely on student memory and reflection. The students in the sample group were getting used to the so-called “new normal”, and some indicated that they would prefer the ERTLA “new normal” to stay.

The data supports the findings and interpretations from the researcher within a consistent and thoroughly researched process as described in 3.6 Research design.

3.7. The Feasibility of the Study

The feasibility of this study was based on the current context of COVID-19 and how it influenced institutions and students on a student engagement level. Although student engagement has been widely defined through decades of research, the particular dimension of COVID-19 requires further research, in this case, exploratory research.

Chaturvedi et al. (2021:6) mentioned specifically how COVID-19 impacted “mental health, education and the daily routine of students”. It was worth investigating how students could be supported to enable them to complete their studies and gain authentic learning experiences. The depth of student engagement and the effect on retention and success rates may be valuable in exploring through communication and interaction between the PHEI and students and closing the feedback loop. This research study could be used to close the feedback loop and provide informed communication to inform the PHEI of student experiences from those brave enough to speak.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1. Analysis of data

Data analysis took place through thematic coding. Maree (2008) described conceptual coding as grouping concepts together. In the analysis phase replacing names, subjects, programmes and specifics at the PHEI with codes, and then drawing themes from the data gathered. Findings were based on the participants’ qualitative responses within both focus groups and interview sessions. Fifteen individuals took part in the research study, expressing their views, feelings, and experiences.

4.2. Findings

Throughout the themes below, the researcher discussed what was collectively said, where some students had similar experiences, and where others might have experienced things opposite to one another.

Six themes were identified. The aim was to reach data saturation, data does not reveal any new information and were combined in the themes below.

4.2.1. Theme 1: Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

Due to the literature on the CoI framework and the researcher forming a baseline of questions on the teaching, social and cognitive presences, a brief summary of the findings is discussed below, grouped under one theme. The teaching, social, and cognitive presences are linked to one

another and are therefore essential to discuss the findings of all three presences under one theme.

4.2.1.1. Teaching Presence

Students were finely attuned to lecturer behaviour and competence, especially during the initial ERTLA transition. Students felt unsure themselves and could recognise the uncertainty in lecturers as well. FG1P3 mentioned that “in regard to like communication, the transition initially from contact to online was interesting because the lecturers didn’t know what to do and how to do it, but then once they got into the notion of how like the online operates, the communication got a lot better”. This statement indicated that this specific participant had the capacity to extend grace towards lecturers, who were also learning and adapting to the ERTLA platforms. There were a few participants that felt the transition was well organised and without too many complications. For example, IP6 stated, “I found the transition back more difficult, but the transition to online was seamless.”

4.2.1.2. Social Presence

Students seemed to have longed for physical interaction with both peers and lecturers. For some, it seemed to enhance their experience. FG1P3 framed by: "So, for me personally, in terms of efficiency, online, in terms of having an amazing experience, I'd go in-person." The participant acknowledged that ERTLA had value in terms of efficiency but wanted the physical experience through face-to-face interaction.

4.2.1.3. Cognitive Presence

Students have expressed that they feel the need to see peer work to gauge themselves. Viewing peer work seemed to take place in physical classrooms, but not so much in ERTLA classrooms, where lecturers discuss student work individually. Students feel that they learn from one another and better know how to improve on their own work by visually experiencing other students' progress work.

IP7 expressed that she preferred feedback in the physical classroom, "I want to talk about it, in-person. Because you want to ask, and you want to talk about it. Which you can't always do

online." Some students feel that they are limited in time and quality of feedback online, whereas the feedback in-person is much more engaging and valuable.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Classroom Engagement

Participants found that group work, class and group discussions, presentations, and watching educational videos on the topic at hand as positive engagement in the classroom. Most students enjoyed learning orientated games that were introduced in class, especially during the ERTLA method of learning. Some students mentioned that ice-breaker exercises were introduced at the beginning of some of their classes or even open social discussions before class started, which gave them the opportunity to feel more included into the class environment and take part in discussions with more confidence.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Time management

Nearly all participants agreed that they have more time during ERTLA than during contact class. Participants were free to choose to work when they felt rested and focused. IP5 proudly said that "COVID also showed me that I am capable of studying on my own, online and doing my projects my way and with my time management". Each student established a routine for themselves, some more effectively planning their own days and others doing the bare minimum.

4.2.4. Theme 4: Commute

A component mentioned where participants realised, they lost time when they had to start attending contact classes again was "now we have to think about one issue we've all had is travel time", as mentioned by IP6. Some students travel one and a half to two hours one way. The commute takes about one to four hours out of a student's day, time the participant felt they could spend on projects. Participants also raised the issue of rising petrol prices, making commuting to campus four times a week difficult. Especially if participants can see the opportunity for classes to be moved to accommodate them for fewer days on campus, ensuring students save time and money.

4.2.5. Theme 5: Emotional and Psychological component within education

Students seem to be affected on an emotional and psychological level as well, realising that "I think COVID definitely affected me mentally, much more than it physically ever could...I think

there was a lot more than just the studies, but I think at the end of the day, it comes down to stress. The stress got too much for me to handle." FG1 Participant 4 said. FG1P5 admitted that "I started developing very bad health anxiety". Specific to studies, FG1P2 mentioned that "I had days where I like, feel like it's a mistake, what I got myself into?"

Some students reached beyond themselves, perhaps for social survival, when "I became an essential worker as well for like weekends and stuff, just because I wanted to get out of the house", bravely stated by FG1P3.

The emotional and psychological theme became more prominent than expected. Some students automatically mentioned their psychological struggles, whereas others only went into depth about their experiences and feelings when the researcher delved deeper into the effect COVID may have had on participants, especially when peers in FG1 opened up to the researcher, one after the other did the same.

4.2.6. Theme 6: Information Technology (IT)

Most students were in the fortunate position not to lack anything during the ERTLA measures. Some noted that reliable Wi-Fi or internet complicated their learning experiences and the unpredictability of Loadshedding. Students became aware that "it's easy to have a presentation online because we can all see. There's no trouble with speakers for videos," as mentioned by IP7. Some students enjoyed their setup at home, having headsets and a second monitor.

4.2.7. Theme 7: Student voice

Literature is welcoming to the student's voice, and the PHEI is more than willing to listen. However, students feel that they are not being heard, and their queries tend to. Some students were thankful for being validated by the researcher, feeling a sense of relief by just being able to share their stories and put words to the feelings and experiences they had since they started the tertiary education journey in 2020.

Although, the researcher found that perceptions greatly differ when hearing remarks stating, "I think the worst mistake that could have been made, was choosing third-year to do this transition because of the workload has already increased by so much" as so strongly mentioned by IP8. In

contrast, another participant found the transition to her advantage in learning how to work as a team in a contact class. Participants' perceptions on workload and work complexity became connected to the fact that students are now "seen" in contact and not due to their third-year level. Participants might not realise real-world implications and that the ERTLA measures were to prevent catastrophe and not permanently shield them from reality.

4.3. Key findings



Figure 2: A word cloud generated with interview data specifically on the preferences of participants pertaining contact, virtual or hybrid; generated on <https://www.wordclouds.com/>.

The word cloud above represents what students said in the interview and focus group sessions—depicting the classroom as the most prominent choice, while other delivery methods and word choices start disappearing in the background.

4.3.1. Physical classroom

Many students agree upon social interaction as the main learning commodity they missed about physically attending class. Due to their short-lived experience of a few weeks on campus during 2020, they did not have the opportunity to connect and make friends. Most of their tertiary learning experiences took place on the ERTLA platforms, and coming back to campus in a hybrid learning environment in 2022, IP3 stated, "I really didn't expect to enjoy campus learning as much as I do." Although the aim of their studies was initially to be contact classes only, in hindsight, IP4

shared that "I want to be able to tell stories of the vibe, of the feeling, of the memories that I made on campus. And I'll never be able to do that if I learned virtually." For a particular group of students, the advantage of the physical classroom is immeasurable.

4.3.2. Emergency Remote, Teaching, Learning and Assessment (ERTLA)

Students recognise the value of ERTLA through their flexible schedules and time management opportunities. For some, it is comfortable, and they do not have a tremendous urge to return to physical classes. FG1P3 feels that "I'm thinking in terms of efficiency and like getting your work done online is perfect". However, in terms of people interaction, FG1P4 feels that "online, you lose use micro emotion". It seems like the introverted learner who likes to have control prefer the virtual environment, regardless of missing out on social events or connection.

4.3.3. Hybrid classroom

Students were in a hybrid learning phase when the researcher conducted the interviews and focus group sessions. A prominent component seemed to be the convenience and the mere "choice" they would like to have in a hybrid classroom environment and not be limited to either contact or virtual classrooms.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Summary of main point

Participants seem to enjoy especially the social aspect of attending contact classes but would like to have the freedom of having the choice of attending a class virtually. They miss the recordings they had access to in ERTLA sessions, being able to go back and rewatch sessions or parts of sessions where they felt they needed to. The recordings allowed students to bridge the gap in missed information and come up to speed if they were ill. With contact classes, there are no recordings, and engaging with missed information becomes a challenge to near impossible. Some participants felt excluded and unable to get quality education due to illness and not being allowed on campus. They question the flexibility of lecturers adjusting classes from contact to online when it suited them, but students did not have that same luxury.

5.2. Interpretation of results in terms of the literature review

In a study by Patwardhan et al. (2020), focusing on the Col framework within ERT, they stated that through their studies, they found that a strong teaching presence contributed highly to student satisfaction. Some of the participants drew on the energy from the lecturer in terms of their competency on virtual platforms and digital interactions, for example online games.

In terms of the social aspect of student engagement, Kahu (2013:10) mentioned that most students experienced an initial culture shock when they embarked on Higher Education; it influenced their interactions with one another, guided their expectations and motivations, and also “foster a sense of belonging”. Participants realised only when Hybrid classes became their reality that the social presence played such a tremendous role in their self-development and sense of belonging. Patwardhan et al. (2020) also stated that the social presence was a major point in satisfaction.

The cognitive presence is dependent on the course design, Patwardhan et al. (2020) stated the importance of blended learning approaches, despite the fact that their study showing student satisfaction in terms of the cognitive presence was not really observed positively. Participants in this study gave diverse answers by pointing out certain subjects which are, in their view, better on virtual delivery modes, whereas others, mostly practical subjects were preferred face-to-face.

Autonomous time management is a crucial component in ERT; in the study by Lafleur et al. (2021), where students identified the opportunities of waking up just in time for class, having the freedom of regulating their own schedules and mentioned how they saved on time not having to commute to campus and back home.

The effects COVID-19 and the lockdown rules and regulations had, Naidoo and Cartwright (2020) describe as a “disruptive and traumatic phenomenon”. Participants mentioned how in some respects, their personal trauma went unmentioned to academic staff, which in some cases led to mental breakdown and in others cases, the student just managed to push through. Naidoo and Cartwright (2020) mentioned that during the pandemic, Student Counselling Services increased in demand, having to cope with the general diversities and inequalities that came with South African history and, on top of that, providing a service on virtual platforms, an implementation

that varies from institution to institution. In this study, the PHEI did not have Student Counselling Services apart from the national helpline, The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG).

Lafleur et al. (2021) mentioned that students expressed their frustration with Information Technology, who had technical issues during their study time. Participants in this study mainly indicated that they had initial internet connectivity and Wi-Fi challenges, which were solved over time.

Participants recognised the value of recordings of a lecture, although Nkomu & Daniel (2021) categorised four types of users of recordings: the ones that do not find them necessary because they paid enough attention in class; the second group who attended lectures but use the recordings support their learning; a third group who attended class and only accessed recordings to catch up missed sessions; and the last group who did not attend lectures and only listened to recordings.

The Student Voice within Higher Education had mainly become a method of co-curriculum design (Brooman, Darwent and Pimor. 2015). Whereas Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) describe student voice where students have “the opportunity to influence decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers”. Although some scholars are sceptic and others are welcoming, empowering students to participate in their educational experience actively, it is vital to understand what students experience and find ways to support their ever-changing situations. However, ultimately the learning process stays their responsibility.

5.3. Broader meaning of results

In the broader view of the results, participants clearly stated that they did not realise the value of the social presence, but since experiencing the social aspect, and even the in-person interaction with the lecturers made participants realise the importance of physical interaction and connection.

Most students seem to prefer a hybrid mode of learning, providing less commute, saving on travelling costs and gaining a couple of hours to rest and spend on projects.

5.4. Implications for future research and recommendations

5.4.1. Future research

Researching the view lecturers have on reflecting on 2020 up to and until the current hybrid mode of learning. It would be worth inspecting the lecturer's view on the fluctuations between delivery methods, how it affected their class preparation and presentation, how they experienced the student, and lastly, their personal experiences.

It would be interesting to follow these participants in their careers and execute a longitudinal study on how COVID-19 influenced their work ethic, coping mechanisms and how they live life due to the past trauma from 2020 to 2022.

The participants require a wide variety of support; not all generalised countermeasures will solve short- or long-term problems. Further study would be ideal for enforcing a certain amount of support and longitudinally sample and evaluating the outcomes of the countermeasures that were put in place. For example, when the researcher submitted the proposal for this study, there was no psychological support available for students in the history of the PHEI. However, at the time of interviews and focus groups, on-site psychological help became available to students. It seems like students are doubtful and sceptical. Perhaps a better introduction to the availability of this service should be considered—especially destigmatising drives to bring students to the point of realising the value of speaking to someone.

Driving the latter even further, there might be value in studying the psychological and emotional components of education and how students can be supported within their educational experience. Navigate student success with the student's emotional or mental health in mind as well as involvement or inclusion of all students (Tinto, 2009).

5.4.2. Recommendations

The researcher invites the PHEI to consider the following recommendations:

A “leniency hybrid approach” where theory classes are delivered online, and practical classes are delivered face-to-face. The leniency is then provided when students are ill and cannot attend a class for a good reason, that they may attend class online.

Presentations to still take place virtually, despite students being in face-to-face classes, allowing for recording and students having a clear view on their personal screen of the presentation. This will enhance better-quality sound if they need to watch a video online, rather than lecturers struggling with IT equipment like projectors and speakers. This will also allow for students who cannot join the face-to-face class to watch the recording afterwards or attend an online class.

Face-to-face classes be grouped into two or three classes per day, reducing the number of days students must commute to campus, saving them time and travelling costs.

Switching on cameras while in an online class. Depending on the class size, small classes can keep their cameras on throughout the class session, which will assist the lecturer in reading the class and seeing whether they are engaged. In bigger classes students should switch on cameras at the beginning and end of a session, and while engaging in a discussion. A lecturer can then easily adjust teaching methods to create more engagement online. The study revealed that students need to be seen.

Tools and methods used in ERTLA modes of learning, to initiate student engagement, should still be used in the physical classroom setting. Starting classes of with a “bonding” or “ice-breaker” exercise provoke engagement from students, they feel more relaxed with one another and their minds are open to learning. Inclusivity is brought through relaxed and engaged students taking part in their personal learning process.

Compulsory social events, to motivate students to mingle and get to know one another. This will also assist in coherent and consistent relationships, which will enhance the group work experience, where students generally do not know one another.

Lecturer training, in terms of lesson planning and incorporating learning activities in class to make both face-to-face and virtual classes more interactive. Participants also mentioned that lecturers are not clear on their boundaries when communicating availability to respond to student queries.

Briefs must have appropriate rubrics that accompany brief outlines, providing clear marking guidelines and expectations to students, and creating a standard for performance and marking.

Student support was not previously available to students but has recently been introduced to campuses. Student support is more than just placing a social worker in a room for students to have the opportunity to speak to; the researcher recommends that creating awareness and destigmatising mental illness is vital to the success of the student support programme. Students need guidance on the value of support outside their family and friends.

5.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, although there are mixed feelings about the preference between face-to-face and ERTLA, participants subconsciously kept referring to the experience and value received in face-to-face classrooms in terms of the social presence with peers and lecturers, feedback and concept understanding (cognitive presentence). Only the lecturer's presence depended on the lecturer's ability to communicate through virtual platforms or face-to-face availability to focus on student queries. Students prefer the hybrid delivery method of having some classes face-to-face and some classes on a virtual platform.

Emotional and psychologically, students are affected more than lecturers and campus staff generally realised, due to shame and personal failure in reaching out for help. Repercussions are still to be determined, possibly later in their lives.

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ANNEXURE A: CONCEPT DOCUMENT

TITLE: Student engagement amid oscillating delivery methods within a South African Private Higher Education Institution during a pandemic.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
This aims to explore and scrutinise the phenomenon of student engagement that students have experienced since 2020, to uncover the gaps in understanding the current influences on student engagement, and to determine the effect delivery method fluctuations brought to student engagement and therefore how each delivery method influenced the student's attention	How does oscillating delivery methods between face-to-face and ERLTA affect student engagement with undergraduate students who enrolled for face-to-face courses during 2020 and 2021?	Studies on traditional face-to-face education indicate that student engagement contributes to student success. In recent years technology also plays an essential role in student engagement and learning. These two worlds have collided during the state of disaster because of COVID-19. Instability and uncertainty within emergency educational measures have brought forward a field of study within student engagement, which did not exist previously. This study investigates student engagement as a whole and what it represents. It further explores	Rogers, C.R. 1959. <i>A Theory Of Therapy, Personality And Interpersonal Relationships, As Developed In The Client-Centered Framework</i>. Psychology: A Study of a Science, 1(3) 184-256. Rogers, C.R. 1946. Significant Aspects of Client-Centred Therapy. <i>The American Psychologist</i>, 1(10), 415-422.	Theme 1: Higher Education in South Africa Theme 2: Student Engagement Theme 3: Delivery Modes and the differences between face-to-face, blended and ERLTA Theme 4: Models of Engagement, specifically focussing on Col, teaching, social and cognitive presences. Theme 5: Phenomenology and Rogers Humanist Theory	Paradigm Interpretivism Epistemology Gain knowledge and understanding of human behaviour to interpret the students' point of view of engagement with the institution and how they perceive the effect of varying delivery methods. Ontology Each individual's experience is subjective to their unique interactions and experience with reality. Metatheoretical The assumption reveals meanings and values. Participants will be quoted verbatim. Methodology Systematic procedure for collecting and analysing data. Axiology	Qualitative Approach	Step 1: Send out a nationwide email to invite students to participate in focus groups.	Students was free and willing participants. Within the focus groups and interviews, participants information was handled confidentially throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Each student was assigned a number and used that number to respond and where they did not use the number, the Researcher edited the names used in the transcription to the appropriate number. Students were provided with consent forms and the interview schedule to complete before the focus groups and interviews were conducted. Within the consent form it is	The researcher anticipates finding several dilemmas which hinder student engagement. The students will voice their views and experiences, which will be analysed for similarities and patterns.	Du Plooy-Cilliers, F, Davis, C & Bezuidenhout, R-M. 2014. <i>Research Matters</i>. Juta and Company [Pty] Ltd, Claremont. Garrison, D.R. and Arbaugh J.B. 2007. Researching the community of inquiry framework: Review, issues, and future directions. <i>Internet and Higher Education</i>, 10(3) 157-172. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2007.04.001. [Accessed 11 October 2021]. Kahu, E. 2013. Framing student engagement in higher education. <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>, 38(5). [Online]. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233479969_Framing_Student_Engagement_in_Higher_Education
						Population	The detailed population of students will include NQF level 7 students from Diploma and Degree qualifications, from all national campuses, enrolled during the time of data collection.			
						Fifteen NQF level 7, Degree Students from two of the five campuses participated in the study.	Step 2: Only two participants took part in interviews which resulted that the researcher visited the closest two campuses for face-to-face invitation to participate. Ten students participated in face-to-face interviews and focus groups and three more virtual. Total of fifteen participants.			
							Step 3: Provided participants with consent documentation and the		The study resulted in the following themes: Theme 1: Col Teaching Presence Social Presence Cognitive Presence Theme 2: Time Management Theme 3: Commute Theme 4: Emotional and Psychological component Theme 5: Information Technology (IT) Theme 6: Student Voice	

		student engagement in face-to-face classrooms, with a brief overview of blended learning in the face-to-face classroom setting. Research on student engagement in ERTLA sheds light on the differences between face-to-face, online and ERTLA classrooms. The importance of integrated approaches and laying it out in lesson plans in ERTLA classroom environments.			Complex understanding of unique realities. Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout. 2014:31.		interview schedule. Step 4: Online recordings made it possible to transcribe data. Step 5: The Researcher edited data that was transcribed through transcription software.	mentioned that in some instances, students might be quoted verbatim. Specifics in regard to courses, modules, subject and lecturers was removed and would not be disclosed to the IIE, findings were presented in code names.		er Education. [Accessed on 11 October 2021]. Lafleur, L., Andrews, R., Raichura, T., Fusco, W., Fuisting, B. 2021. Student's Experiences of Emergency Remote Teaching. In P. Clements, R. Derrah, & P. Ferguson (Eds.), Communities of teachers & learners. JALT. [Online]. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2020-16 . [Accessed on 26 September 2021].
Research Problem	Secondary Question	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution	Lygo-Baker, S., Kinchin, I.M., and Winstone N.E. 2019. Engaging Student Voices in Higher Education. <i>Diverse Perspectives and Expectations in Partnership</i> . Switzerland. PalGrame MacMillan. [Online]. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-20824-0 . [Accessed on 11 October 2021].
Students enrolled at the beginning of 2020 into face-to-face learning institutions, to provide them with the service of contact classes, attending classes physically and receiving their information and communicatio	None	Student engagement Face-to-face learning Emergency Remote Teaching Learning and Assessment	Carl Rogers' Rogers Humanist Theory			Non-probability and Voluntary Sampling method: Thematic Coding Focus Groups: One group of five One group of two Interviews Five virtual Three face-to-face	Unit of Analysis Qualitative data from participants taking part in focus groups and Interviews Data Analysis Method(s): Thematic content analysis Coding themes and patterns and similarities Draw conclusion from the data	Limitations: Due to time and size of study, other perspectives were not considered, for example lecturer perspectives. There is only time for cross-sectional data collection, allowing data collection to take place only once. There will be no opportunity to	Further Research: - Exploring lecturer experience and perspectives. - Follow participants into careers and see how COVID-19 influenced them long term. - Support required by participants, some serious and urgent situations. - Studying the psychological and emotional component in more depth.	Meyer, K. 2014. Student

n as such, even in blended classrooms and combined technology classes. However, COVID-19 changed the scene as the lives of all people became a commodity to preserve and education needed to adjust to ERTLA.								devise and implement strategic countermeasures. Delimitations: The researcher approached a PHEI in South Africa, where students enrolled in face-to-face Undergraduate Accredited Programmes, extending an invitation to five South African Campuses (Pretoria, Midrand, Cape Town, Durban, Stellenbosch), where participants would be in their final year of study, third-year (Diploma NQF level 6 and Degree NQF level 7), in the beginning of their 2022 academic year.	Recommendations: • Hybrid mode • Presentations virtual and recorded, also allow for students who are sick to either watch recording or attend online. • Face-to-face classes grouped into two or three sessions a day to reduce days of commute. • Switching cameras on • Compulsory social events. • Lecturer training to make classrooms more interactive, better communication virtual and f2f, and marking rubrics accompanying briefs.	Engagement in Online Learning: What Works and Why. <i>ASHE Education Report</i>, 40(6) 1-114. [Online]. DOI: 10.1002/aehe.20018. [Accessed 11 October 2021]. Vallee, D. 2017. Student engagement and inclusive education: reframing student engagement. <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i>, 21(9) 920-937. [Online]. DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2017.1296033. [Accessed 11 October 2021]. De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. and Delpont, C.S.L. eds. 2011. <i>Research at grass roots – for the social sciences and human service professions</i>. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
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ANNEXURE B1: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS – Focus Group (template)

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Marna Kriel and I am a student at Varsity College Online. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Ruan van den Berg for a study that aims to explore and inspect the circumstances surrounding student engagement since 2020, to better understand the current influences on student engagement. This study will look at the effect delivery method (contact or virtual) fluctuations brought to student engagement and how each delivery method influenced the student's attention. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the challenges you or others may have experienced in terms of student engagement during a pandemic. Ethical clearance was granted by Inscape (IEG201021MK) and The Independent Institute of Education/Varsity College Online (28 November 2021) to conduct the above-mentioned research. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation will involve, I have formulated questions so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below and email it back to me.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because your view and experience of living through and studying in a time of a global pandemic, will provide valuable insight into student engagement and its effect on students. If you decide to participate in this research you should read through the Interview Schedule, which indicates the questions that will be discussed in the focus group session. A focus group is a group of no more than five (5) students, who will answer each question according to their experience. Each student will receive a number, and after the statement of each question, the students will answer in the same sequence, from one (1) to five (5), providing the opportunity to add to what others have experienced by stating your number first and then providing your opinion. The group interview session will last up to 45 minutes. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
There will be no negative impact on you, whether you decide to withdraw at any time or do not take part in this study. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your engagement in your studies and how the pandemic affected you as a person. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with a question, you may withdraw or refrain from answering.

Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in the transcribed data or any research summaries and I will ensure that any other details are disguised so that nobody would be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at VC Online or Inscape, will have access to your interview data. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries from the transcribed data to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Marna Kriel [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Dr Ruan van den Berg [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent	
I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Marna Kriel about a study that aims to explore and inspect the circumstances surrounding student engagement since 2020, to better understand the current influences on student engagement. This study will look at the effect delivery method (contact or virtual) fluctuations brought to student engagement and how each delivery method influenced the student's attention. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE B2: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS – Interview (template)

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Marna Kriel and I am a student at Varsity College Online. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Ruan van den Berg for a study that aims to explore and inspect the circumstances surrounding student engagement since 2020, to better understand the current influences on student engagement. This study will look at the effect delivery method (contact or virtual) fluctuations brought to student engagement and how each delivery method influenced the student's attention. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the challenges you or others may have experienced in terms of student engagement during a pandemic. Ethical clearance was granted by Inscape (IEG201021MK) and The Independent Institute of Education/Varsity College Online (28 November 2021) to conduct the above-mentioned research. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation will involve, I have formulated questions so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below and email it back to me.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because your view and experience of living through and studying in a time of a global pandemic, will provide valuable insight into student engagement and its effect on students. If you decide to participate in this research you should read through the Interview Schedule, which indicates the questions that will be discussed in the interview session. You will answer each question according to your experience. The session will last up to 45 minutes. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
There will be no negative impact on you, whether you decide to withdraw at any time or do not take part in this study. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your engagement in your studies and how the pandemic affected you as a person. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with a question, you may withdraw or refrain from answering.

Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in the transcribed data or any research summaries and I will ensure that any other details are disguised so that nobody would be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at VC Online or Inscape, will have access to your interview data. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries from the transcribed data to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Marna Kriel [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Dr Ruan van den Berg [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent	
I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Marna Kriel about a study that aims to explore and inspect the circumstances surrounding student engagement since 2020, to better understand the current influences on student engagement. This study will look at the effect delivery method (contact or virtual) fluctuations brought to student engagement and how each delivery method influenced the student's attention. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE C1: CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING – Focus Group (template)

Consent form for participants					
I, _____, agree to allow Marna Kriel to audio record my interviews as part of the research about a study that aims to explore and scrutinise the phenomenon of student engagement that students have experienced since 2020, to uncover the gaps in understanding the current influences on student engagement, and to determine the effect delivery method fluctuations brought to student engagement and therefore how each delivery method influenced the student's attention. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.					
<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="height: 60px;"></td> <td style="height: 60px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signature</td> <td>Date</td> </tr> </table>				Signature	Date
Signature	Date				

ANNEXURE C2: CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING – Interview (template)

Consent form for participants					
I, _____, agree to allow Marna Kriel to audio record my interviews as part of the research about a study that aims to explore and scrutinise the phenomenon of student engagement that students have experienced since 2020, to uncover the gaps in understanding the current influences on student engagement, and to determine the effect delivery method fluctuations brought to student engagement and therefore how each delivery method influenced the student's attention. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.					
<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="height: 60px;"></td> <td style="height: 60px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signature</td> <td>Date</td> </tr> </table>				Signature	Date
Signature	Date				

ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (detailed)

This Annexure D, was sent out via email to all “currently enrolled” third-year students in Diploma and Degree courses, who indicated their willingness to part take in this study, whether for a focus group or interview, virtual or online:

Introduction to Interview:

I would like to thank you for your willingness to assist me with this study.

This study aims to explore and scrutinise the phenomenon of student engagement that students have experienced since 2020, to uncover the gaps in understanding the current influences on student engagement, and to determine the effect delivery method fluctuations brought to student engagement and therefore how each delivery method influenced the student’s attention. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the challenges you or others may have experienced in terms of student engagement during a pandemic, that there will form a sense of clarity where your responsibility lies to actively engage in your studies and where the fluctuations between delivery methods may have influenced you the most.

Background to the study:

You were invited as a participant based on the fact that you are currently enrolled at a Private Higher Education Institution as a third-year student. You have experienced the 2020 and 2021 emergency interventions in education due to COVID-19. You are currently expected to return to partial contact classes from March 2022.

What do we expect from you?

Kindly share your personal experiences in as much detail as possible, related to your studies and how you view your student engagement. Every contribution will be highly valued. Your contributions will be kept completely anonymous.

This session will take about 45 minutes. I will record the interview in order to be able to transcribe the information myself. This will enable me to properly analyse your responses. The recording will also be treated as confidential and saved on my personal computer.

Interview schedule:

Please see the points for discussion below:

1. Community of Inquiry - In which delivery mode of learning did you feel you the best ...
(Explain)

	Classroom	No Different	Virtually (ERTLA)
Teaching Presence - Academic support from your lecturer			
Teaching Presence - Campus support (Campus Directors, Campus admin staff)			
Social Presence - I feel "seen" in my class/people take note of me			
Social Presence - Group projects are better for me when I am ...			
Cognitive Presence - I understand concepts explained to me better when I am learning in a classroom/Virtually			
Cognitive Presence - I understand feedback explained to me better when I am learning in a classroom/Virtually			

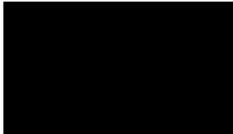
2. Did COVID-19 influence your ability to study? Explain.
3. Compared to the facilities and resources on campus, which of the following are you missing at home?
 - a. Computer/Laptop
 - b. Uninterrupted Wifi/Internet
 - c. Access to the necessary equipment to produce projects
 - d. A dedicated area for you to study
 - e. Dedicated time for your studies
 - f. I lack nothing

4. What are the most engaging activities in your classroom? Explain.
5. What are the least engaging activities in your classroom? Explain.
6. What are the most engaging activities in your virtual classroom? Explain.
7. What are the least engaging activities in your virtual classroom? Explain.
8. Is there anything that you found challenging during the transition between delivery methods (face-to-face or Virtual Learning)? Explain.
9. What did you miss most about physically attending classes? Explain.
10. What will you miss most about virtually attending classes? Explain.
11. What is your biggest fear about returning to physical classes? Explain.
12. What is your biggest fear about returning to virtual classes? Explain.
13. Is there anything that you would like the researcher to know? Explain.

Closing remarks:

I would like to thank you sincerely for your honest and valuable responses and inputs.

ANNEXURE E: GATEKEEPERS LETTER - IEG201021MK

Consent form to conduct research at company/organisation/association	
I [REDACTED] in my capacity as Chief Academic Officer of [REDACTED] grant permission to Marna Kriel to conduct research at the South African Campuses of the Institution, sampling third year undergraduate students affected by the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 lockdown rules and regulations within the Education sector. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. I indicate the conditions below.	
Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:	
The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report.	☒
The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report.	☐
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:	
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository...	
<u>Immediately</u> after complete.	☒
<u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed.	☐
Number of months, if selected:	
	21/10/2021
Signature	Date