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## **The Vindication of Decoloniality and the Reality of COVID-19 as an Emergency of Unknown in Rural Universities**

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# **The Vindication of Decoloniality and the Reality of COVID-19 as an Emergency of Unknown in Rural Universities**

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## **Abstract**

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COVID-19 was adjudged as a pandemic by the World Health Organization in February 2020. This deadly, contagious, and easy-to-spread virus has plunged the world into a tentative cul-de-sac, inclusive of the university education system. By implication, the abrupt national lockdown in South Africa cut rural universities unaware as an insurgence against its operationalisation, teaching, and learning process. In my argument, it further confirms the need to decolonise rural universities, to be able to respond to every unforeseen emergency, as an underside of coloniality. This study is lensed through Transformative Paradigm (TP), Participatory Research (PR) was used as a research design. The participants consisted of 15 people, five management staff, five lecturers and five students in a selected rural university. Online and phone interviews were used to collect data from the participants because the participants are under national lockdown, and the data were analysed using Thematic Analysis. Low technology and innovative space in rural universities and students, lecturers and university's disadvantage background were found as the major challenges vindicating the quest for decoloniality in rural universities. Also, the compulsory used of technological innovation within the university and contingency plan for/by the stakeholders are achievable with Assets-Based Approach.

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**Keywords:** decoloniality, COVID-19, emergency of unknown, alternative to teaching-learning, rural university

# **La Reivindicación de la Descolonización y la Realidad de COVID-19 como Emergencia de lo Desconocido en las Universidades Rurales**

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## **Resumen**

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El COVID-19 fue declarado una pandemia por la Organización Mundial de la Salud en febrero de 2020. Este virus mortal, contagioso y fácil de propagar ha sumido al mundo en un callejón sin salida tentativo, que incluye el sistema educativo universitario. Por implicación, el cierre nacional abrupto en Sudáfrica supuso a las universidades rurales una insurgencia contra su proceso de operacionalización, de enseñanza- aprendizaje. En mi argumento se confirma aún más la necesidad de descolonizar las universidades rurales para poder responder a cada emergencia imprevista, como un lado negativo del colonialismo. Este estudio tiene como objetivo el paradigma transformador (TP), la investigación participativa (PR) se utilizó como diseño de investigación. Los participantes consistieron en 15 personas, cinco miembros del personal administrativo, cinco profesores y cinco estudiantes en una universidad rural seleccionada. Las entrevistas en línea y por teléfono se utilizaron para recopilar datos de los participantes, y los datos se analizaron mediante análisis temático. La reducida tecnología y el espacio innovador en las universidades rurales y los estudiantes, los profesores y los antecedentes de desventaja de la universidad se encontraron como los principales desafíos que reivindican la búsqueda de descolonización en las universidades rurales. Además, el uso obligatorio de la innovación tecnológica dentro de la universidad y el plan de contingencia para / por las partes interesadas se pueden lograr con el enfoque basado en activos.

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**Palabras clave:** descolonización, COVID-19, emergencia de lo desconocido, alternativa a enseñanza-aprendizaje, universidad rural



The whole world was put on hold as a result of coronavirus (deadly and contagious) emanated from Wuhan, China, in late 2019 (Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir & Siddique, 2020). At such a critical time in the world's history, there are bound reactions on the causes and effects of the major global pandemic as declared by World Health Organisation in February 2020 (WHO, 2020a). In fact, many theories have been invented and reinvented to provide intellectual directions and cue into what had held the world into a static tragedy. Religious leaders, political analysts, the learned and the unlearned have all advanced their thoughts and expressed their opinions on the outbreak. Policies have been hastily formulated in direct response to the pandemic. This has further strengthened the position of Clary (1985) that "crises have always played a role in policy formulation, but the entire structure of disaster response was crisis-driven (and fear-laden)". My position is, however, not to place more emphasis on the political actions and inactions of the crisis situation as entrenched in the coronavirus emergency but to expose the unpreparedness, lapses and the challenges of the university education to respond to the pandemic most especially the "unknown" otherwise referred to as "*unforeseen contingencies*". This is because the deadly, contagious, and easy-to-spread virus has since the beginning of the year 2020 plunged the world into a tentative cul-de-sac, inclusive of the university education.

Researches confirmed that the predominant measure against the spread of the pandemic is to ensure social distancing, self-isolation, and the abolition of people's gathering (Krishnakumar & Rana, 2020; WHO, 2020b). In line with this, WHO (2020c) recommended that all the affected countries should enforce policies on social distancing, streamline managerial bureaucracy in the workplaces, among others. These recommendations had led many countries of the world through their government to place an embargo on the people's movement and subsequence restriction of all activities that involve too many persons gathering together. By implication, the abrupt national lockdown declared by South Africa government in March 2020, to respond to the spread of COVID-19 as recommended by WHO, cut universities unaware as an insurgency against its operationalization, teaching, and learning process. This argument reflected in the way and manner many universities shut down their academic and administrative spaces without immediate palliative measures that could bring the system back to operation either by proxy or

#### 4 *Omodan – COVID-19 and Rural Universities*

otherwise. This situational halt was confirmed by various correspondence from university authorities in South Africa to their respective students to hide in their homes without an alternative to teaching and learning system. This is supported by the claim of Ebrahim, Ahmed, Gozzer, Schlagenhauf and Memish (2020) that the state of lockdown halted the economic services and products of the global south, including South Africa. This does not exempt Educational institutions because many universities, especially rural universities, were left with uncertainty and unavoidable postponement of classroom activities and examinations (Roy et al., 2020).

Although not all universities would be affected drastically in the amelioration process of the current COVID-19 crisis situation, that is, the problem seems to be applicable to all universities, but some universities are more vulnerable than the other. This is to say that Universities in Urban may be advantageous than the rurally located universities in terms of response to emergency and cosmopolitan contingency response to a crisis and its management. The observed vulnerability may be connected to limited educational resources found to be the major challenges of rural institutions in South Africa (Omodan, Tsotetsi & Dube, 2019). In my observation, the university that is located in the QwaQwa Municipality of South Africa seems to be vulnerable in the event of COVID-19 response to alternative teaching and learning. Adjudging this observation, cognisance is noticed to the fact that students are lockdown in their rural homes that are assumed to be in remote areas with little or no access to the internet of things. By justification, rural areas mostly lack social and economic viability to sustain technological improvement (Cristobal-Fransi, Montegut-Salla, Ferrer-Rosell, & Daries, 2020). Not only this, but the university also appears to have failed in the area of preparedness towards an alternative to face-to-face contact session originally planned for. This observation is contrary to the quest for transformation in South Africa rural education, and that interpersonal and strategic competence of the system requires more than “process”, but engagement and strategic alternative to the “process” is fundamental (Sahakian & Seyfang, 2018).

The perceived inability of rural universities to respond well to the lacuna created by COVID-19 may not be a difference from what Wahab & Tyasari (2020) regarded as lack of managerial and professional efficacy toward emergency management in the university system. In the same vein, the

perceived management inefficacy to respond quickly to students' academic need also negate the postulation of United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) that all inclusive alternative to development should be put in place to mitigate every unforeseen disaster to ensure holistic and sustainable development in rural organisations (Houa & Wu, 2020) including university system. All these pointed out to the fact that university management in rural locations and beyond should be able to evaluate, propose and respond to its stakeholders need by providing prompt solutions to their problem in order to ensure that their well-being, social, academic and human development is guaranteed. In line with the recommendation of Wigmore-Álvarez, Ruiz-Lozanob, Fernández-Fernándezc (2020) that university governing bodies should incorporate social responsibility approach as one of their management skills. All these recommendations still point to the fact that universities in rural areas still need to be transformed to meet up with people's agitation towards university coloniality.

In order to re-join the lacuna of COVID-19 in rural universities, the place of decoloniality as a tool for transformation is imminent, that is, the system need to be decolonised to respond to the issue of marginalisation, “forgottenness”, inequality in distribution of academic resources to rural locations to cater for the assumed previously disadvantaged people (Grydehøj, 2016; McLeana, Grahamb, Suchet-Pearsona, Simona, Salt, & Parashar, 2019; Griffiths, 2019). In this discourse, I acknowledge that decolonising rural universities cannot be separated from a renewed geographical research and teaching in an increasing context of previously disadvantage universities located in the settler of colonial nations including South Africa (McLeana et al., 2019). Decoloniality, in this context, could be linked to how university operations, including how teaching and learning, among others, could be remade to enhance resources allocation and its management. By doing this, the stakeholders, including the students in such universities will be liberated, exposed and emancipated to the world of equal international competitiveness. This is supported by the assertion of McLeana et al. (2019) and Hendricks (2018) that there is need for institutions to employ a decolonising strategy within the context of a neo-liberalised university environment that will be favourable and comfortable for learners and other university stakeholders to perform their responsibilities and to discharge their functions without the feeling of deprivation and been disadvantaged. From the above, I, therefore,

## 6 *Omodan – COVID-19 and Rural Universities*

argue that to actualise such decolniality agenda, the place of social and stakeholders' collaboration is not negotiable. That is why the study is underpinned by the Asset-Based Approach (ABA).

### **Theoretical Framework: Asset-Based Approach**

In a time of national emergency such as COVID-19, relying only on the government to cater for all and sundry may be detrimental in the developing country like South Africa. To ameliorate this, collaborative practices as an assumption of Assets-Based Approach (ABA) becomes an unavoidable alternative means to managing rural universities. According to Coleman, Minor, Seed and Wakeman (2020), asset-based approach is suitable for research aiming to uncover the usefulness of rural people to themselves by building a social network within their community in order to make them aware that they possess all the assets needed to emancipate themselves. This is in line with the analysis of Kobayashi, Cloutier, Khan & Fitzgerald (2020) that ABA's idea is to emancipate the vulnerable rural dwellers with the notion that they can leverage on their diversity, resourcefulness, independence, and resilience to build themselves away from the historically "dis-membered" way of "doing" into ingenious modernity. From this analysis, one could then corroborate that APA is a way of making sure that rural universities are prepared to peruse themselves with meaningful engagement and participation with their environment. This will help them to discover and to make use of the available resources to empower themselves without relying on external or foreign assistance. These involved but not limited to; discovering their uniqueness, relying on their human capital such as talent, gift and capabilities, unity and networking among social groups to enhance that more opportunities are provided instead of focusing on their weaknesses (Shiggins, Soskolne, Olenik, Pearl, Haaland-Johansen, Isaksen, Jagoe, McMenamin, & Horton, 2020; Coleman, et al., 2020).

If the people, most especially the university stakeholders are exposed to this, by implication, they will realise their worth, capacity, capabilities and asset, and consequently, be empowered. This is certain because ABA focuses more on the availably hidden physical human, cultural, environmental and political assets to transform, emancipate and "re-membered" people during emergencies and other contingencies (Omodan 2019; Reardon, 2014). In line

with the characteristics of APA as highlighted by Kobayashi, et al. (2020) which includes: “addressing community issues using a multi-scalar, place-based approach”. In their argument, any organisation engaging in such approaches is enhancing the quality of life of people within their skills, knowledge and resources. That is, when the voices of people, associations, and internal institutions are involved collaboratively in the process of generating solution to issues will promote a sustainable, just, equal and possible development for all (De Andrade & Angelova, 2020).

The growing relevance of this theory lies in the interest of Asset-Based as an intervention that promotes the galvanisation of available resources within the university to respond to students and other stakeholders’ need. This enables the rural universities to look inwardly within the limit of their resources and plan ahead of any contingencies that might impede on their activities. This in accordance with the assumption APA that the community itself is asset rich and capable of rigging itself from the underside of coloniality such as inequalities and forgotten-ness that has characterised resource allocation to rural universities. On the side of students as important stakeholders, they are assumed to lack access to the internet and other devices that could enable them to cope with alternative teaching and learning which could be a complete online teaching and learning. In this case, the rural universities do not need to wait for external factors to provide such facilities. They are asset rich and could explore ways by which such a problem could be mitigated (Omodan, Tsotetsi & Dube, 2019) without external intervention. Since the principle of ABA forms a kind of collaboration between community stakeholders, the process if not an end in itself, it will be a mean to an end. Based on this, the following question will guide the study.

### **Research Question**

1. How can the reality of COVID-19 as an emergency of the unknown be re-examined to prepare rural universities towards unforeseen circumstances that could hinder its operations?



## **Research Objectives**

In response to the above question, the following research objectives pilot the studies;

1. The study examines the challenges responsible for the inability of rural universities to respond to the lacuna of COVID-19 through any alternative swiftly.
2. The study explores the possible solutions to mitigate challenges towards a de-colonial and Asset-Based strategy.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Paradigm and Design**

This study is lensed with Transformative Paradigm (TP) to ensure that the current situation of rurally located universities is transformed and decolonised using ABA. This paradigm is appropriate because its priority is based on post-modernism, emancipation and ideological in changing the existing *status quo* for better (Gunbayi, 2020). In similar parlance, TP enables equal efforts among the people (university stakeholders) to challenge unequal power differential and reconstruct themselves within their sovereignty (Hughes, 2020). To achieve this, the researcher and the “researched” must come to term on an equal and collaborative pedestal to finding solutions to the problem. By so doing, the use of Participatory Research Design is imminent. This design is relevant because it prioritizes genuine involvement of the understudies in the planning, process and solution stage as co-researchers (Ruffa & Harrison, 2020). This research design places more value on a collaborative effort by engaging the researcher(s) and the “researched” (without discrimination) in the process of finding solutions to a problem.

### **Method of Data collection and Selection Approach**

In other to effectively implement Participatory Research Design, the use of a free attitude interview that enables the participants to freely express their views on the challenges and the possible solutions as highlighted in the research objectives was employed. The interviews were conducted on the

selected participants within a selected rural University, QwaQwa, South Africa. During this study, all universities, including QwaQwa campus of University of the Free State were under “*lockdown*”; due to this, it is impossible to meet the participant face-to-face. Therefore, the researcher engaged the use of snowballing selection approach to select 15 participants, among which are; 5 university management team member (*such as the deans, head of schools, head of teaching and learning and ICT members*), 5 lecturers and 5 students within the same university. I decided to use this kind of selection method because it is convenient, and it is applied when there are difficulties in accessing subjects with targeted characteristics, and the subjects are only made hold based on referrers (Audemard, 2020). The interview was, therefore, conducted using Phone calls, electronic mails and WhatsApp. This enabled the participants to fully express their minds toward the issue without fear of any speech act’s complexity.

### **Participant Profiling**

As explained above, the participant in this study comprises of university management staff, university students, and university lecturers. The university management staff include the head of departments, members of the Teaching and Learning Centre and the ICT staff. They are assumed to be in the known when it comes to university inputs, process and outputs and above all, they are all in charge of management, improvement and or development of teaching and learning in the selected university. The lecturers that were involved in the study were those with a minimum of two years experiences and above in the selected rural university. The students that were involved in the study are in their third year and above with an assumption that they have adequate experience of the selected university and its environs, which they are also part of.

### **Method of Data Analysis Ethical Consideration**

The data collected was analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) which was described as a method of qualitative data analysis that is appropriate for data categorization (Safarpour, Khorasani-Zavareh & Mohammadi, 2020). By doing this, six steps of doing thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2013) was

adopted. These steps involve data familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, studying the themes, naming the themes, and presenting the result (Ando, Cousins & Young, 2014; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). These steps were critically engaged in the analysis. The issue of ethical considerations was observed by ensuring that all the participants were given the freedom to express their thoughts without imposition. They were also given the freedom to withdraw from participating in the process should they feel uncomfortable or unsure of themselves. In order to protect their identities from any unforeseen or potential harms, they were represented using pseudo names during the data collection and data analysis. The University Management Team was represented with UMT1, UMT2, UMT3, UMT4, and UMT5; University Lecturers were represented with UL1, UL2, UL3, UL4 and UL5 while University Students were given following pseudo names; US1, US2, US3, US4, and US5. The data collected through PA research design was, therefore analysed below based on the objectives of the study.

### **Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

The data presented below was done to respond to the two objectives; the objectives one was to explore the challenges responsible for the inability of rural universities to swiftly respond to the lacuna of COVID-19. This was done in two themes; Low technology and Innovative space in rural Universities and Students, Lecturers, and University disadvantaged backgrounds. The second objective that explores the possible solutions to the challenges was also analysed based on two themes; compulsory use of technological innovation within the university and contingency plan for/by the stakeholders.

### **The Analysis of the Challenges Responsible for Rural Universities to Swiftly Respond to Change**

**Low technology and Innovative space in rural Universities.** The fourth industrial revolution is currently invoked in universities all over the world, and the innovation is assumed to inform the activities of universities in order to be able to meet up with the aims and objectives of universities and to be able to compete globally. On the contrary, the universities in rural areas are

found with limited educational resources, funds and lack social and economic viability to sustain technological improvement (Cristobal-Fransi, Montegut-Salla, Ferrer-Rosell, & Daries, 2020). This argument reflected in the participants' statements as shown below;

UL2: ...because most of the universities in question including ours are still engage in the conventional method of teaching, most of them are still struggling with changes in the modern world especially teaching with or through the use of internet of things.

US1: The shortages of computers and minimal space in our Libraries and laboratories is proof positive that the institutions are very under developed as far as the Internet of things is concerned.

UL1: Lack of access to ICT facilities at home for rural students affect university from using online means

US2: Rural campuses, even in my school do not have enough capacity to support and provide computer labs to sustain all students; now that it is stay-at-home things, with insufficient basic services, they don't all own laptops to view content and are unable to access the amount of data necessary to engage in course work.

Statement from UL2 shows that the university system in rural areas is still wallowing in the abyss of low and limited technological ways of doing things, including teaching and learning through “internet of things.” This is assumed to have made the students and the system itself to find it challenging to acclimatise with change coming from “internet of things.” That is, these universities, as a result of a lack of adequate sophisticated facilities can still be regarded as underdeveloped universities. This is also supported by the US1 that their university is operating under the shortage of internet usage devices such as computers, and even the laboratories that could contain enough students are not provided. This is also suffixed in the statement of UL1 that the students living in rural areas don't have ICT facilities such as internet-enabled phone and laptop computers at home to enable them to cope with internet teaching and learning means even if the university resort to teach via the internet. In line with the above analysis from UL2, US1, and UL1, the US2 cap it all by showing an encompassing concern that the rural universities do not have enough ICT capacities to provide the needed support for their students to cope with the internet of things, that is, even their computer

## 12 *Omodan – COVID-19 and Rural Universities*

laboratories are not big and equipped enough to cater for all the student during the normal academic sessions. This is to deduce alongside US2 that, when there is a shortage of devices and support during the normal academics activities, then there is a huge probability that the students when asked to study from home, will not lead to the expected outcomes. The devices to access the internet is lacking, which means, even if there is good and free internet, it will still not assist in navigating the situation.

To respond to this, swift transition by universities may become uneasy. This is showed in the below expressions;

UL3: So swift transition will not be easy because, as much as the students will for the first time be trying this online thing and unfortunately, we are going to come across a lot of hiccups, whereas if we had already started with blended learning approaches, it would be easier because we would be familiar with the platforms that we are expected to use now.

UM1: Students' lack of access to devices such as laptops. The students' smartphones may not have enough space to accommodate all of the downloaded materials. Students' access to data may also be another problem. Some of the students rely on internet access in open spaces such as libraries. These places (such as libraries) are currently also observing the lockdown period. It becomes difficult for students to access these spaces.

The statement from UL3 shows that online teaching and learning or the internet of things is not a thing that has been in the practice before the emergency of COVID-19, therefore poses a challenge to the expected change in the university operations, including teaching and learning. This is confirmed from the statement that because the blended learning is a new thing to students, then it will give the lecturer hiccups to achieve the aims and objectives of teaching and learning among students. Even if the student decides to learn the use and familiarise themselves with it, the challenge emanating from the lack of devices to access the internet will still hinder their activities. This is evidenced in the statement of UM1 that the devices owned by the students are not sophisticated enough to cope with numerous materials to be downloaded. The statement of UM1 shows that in some rural locations, there are some public libraries with such facilities, but students in this environment will not be able to access it because of COVID-19 lockdown. I,

therefore, argue that even if the students were allowed to visit such facilities, the facilities would be overwhelmed because the facilities were originally built to accommodate community people as a backup to the university facilities. These revelations boil down to the fact that stakeholders in rural universities battles with inadequate facilities to compete with their urban counterpart when it comes to change in the system. This supported the claim that the university engagement towards its operations requires more than “process,” but an alternative strategic plan to the “process” is by making all resources available (Sahakian & Seyfang, 2018).

**Finding.** The finding, therefore, showed that the university, the student, and the lecturer are lacking the needed use and usage, including the devices and facilities needed to implement the internet of things as an alternative to cope with the change needed to respond to the lacuna of COVID-19 in the rural universities. From this analysis and its finding, I argue that the need for decoloniality of the rural university space to give way for the equal opportunity between the urban and rural university is imminent. The finding of the study further confirmed the conclusion of Heleta (2016) that the opposition to change lie within the structures of the universities and will not be easily dismantled except it is decolonised by breaking down the structural power to ensure equalities. In the same vein, the findings confirmed the reality on the need to remake rural universities by challenging the disadvantaged-ness of the people such as students and other stakeholders (Maila & Rose, 2018).

**Students, lecturers, and university’s disadvantaged background.** The agitation from the well-meaning scholars, activists, and students on the need to transformed and decolonise rural education is not in vacuum to the revelations coming from this study. Inequalities in the distribution of academic resources to rural locations to cater for the assumed previously disadvantaged background people (Grydehøj, 2016) is still one of the significant challenges. That is, the lack of social amenities and infrastructural facilities meant to rejuvenate the disadvantaged background of the university stakeholders is still lacking. This is evidenced in the following conversations from the participants;

## 14 *Omodan – COVID-19 and Rural Universities*

US1: The students that are mostly found in rural institutions are students who are from poor and underprivileged backgrounds. Because of such, they don't have computers or laptops at home, let alone space and a healthy environment.

UL2: the rural universities could not respond to the problem of the pandemic swiftly due to majorly non-preparation or non-readiness for an unforeseen event... there comes a lacuna of COVID 19, this met universities in a sudden state without adequate preparation of having an alternative to teaching and learning.

UL1: Many students learned only from the teachers with textbooks as the main resource, some completed high school without having been in front of the computer. Even Lecturers at the rural universities are used to face to face presentations with the use of PowerPoint. Many use the online means of communication only to pass messages, not for teaching purposes.

UL3: I think the problem with rural universities is that they are still reliant on the traditional way of teaching and learning. Innovation is very scarce, and academics are not encouraged to use innovative teaching and learning methods. I am currently doing a study on the use of the flipped classroom as a teaching and learning approach, and I struggled to find lecturers who use the approach in their classes because people are stuck with the teacher-centered way of teaching.

US2 reiterates that majority of the university students are from the previously disadvantage rural community with no access to devices such as laptops and other social and academic facilities. This lacuna is, no doubt, a challenge that will make such students be more disadvantaged during COVID-19 alternative teaching and learning as a result of national lockdown. The statement of UL2 also confirmed that rural universities were not prepared and at most cases are not even ready for change, maybe this is applicable not only to lecturers but all the stakeholders of the system and this is why the changes require to overcome COVID-19 by changing from the old traditional ways of doing to the new ways is not met. This is to say that the rural university background is not meeting up with the new transformation agenda (Griffiths, 2019). This is also confirmed by the UL2 that most of the students were not familiar with electronic ways of teaching and learning even from their secondary schools' education. They were most familiar with the use of textbooks, that is, the students' background speaks volumes on their university

engagement, which further confirms the need to decolonize and transform rurality and rural university (Omodan, Tsoetsi & Dube, 2019).

Not only that, students are not electronically inclined, the lecturers in rural universities at time also did not utilise the online ways of teaching and learning available before them. The UL2 alleged that “*Lecturers at the rural universities are used to face to face presentation with the use of PowerPoint.*” Such a lecturers’ background, in my interpretation, led to the inevitability of academics to deal with the innovation regarding “*flipped classroom as a teaching and learning approach,*” as mentioned by UL3. This is not that they are not knowledgeable enough, but the fact from the data shows that students and the university itself as a result of their deprivation of resources don’t have enough computer sets, and other facilities for the students to meet up with the alternative to traditional ways. This is also evident in the statement made by UL3 that the rural university is still relying on the traditional way of teaching and learning.

Further revelations coming from students and management staff also re-established that the rurality background of the student and the university itself become a huge challenge for immediate change to take place most especially the rural university that are branches of a big university located in urban areas. This claim is evidenced below;

US3: A few weeks ago, I spoke to a few of my friends from KZN neh, their problems are all similar. They all complained of having network problems with their network providers since they are in rural areas, and now that we have 2 assignments and a test to complete on BB. So yahhh the students have it bad because we don’t come from the same family backgrounds.

UM2: The multi-campus model may also pose challenges if campuses have different realities, for example, one urban and the other being rural.

UM3: Universities like ours, who are the branch of the big university, we are largely dependent on the main campus and senior management to approve and implement the methods and make decisions that affect the immediate teaching and learning on the campus.

The first statement was made by a student who relates with counterparts in



the rural located places of South Africa on the bases to ask how they are coping with online assignment submissions due to them. The reverse is the case that they all are sharing the same social-economic background problem regarding access to social amenities available to their urban counterparts. This is not limited to the student alone; the rural universities here are also viewed as having a disadvantaged background resulting from different realities that exist in the university, which urban universities might advantageously vary. Most especially the universities that have their main decision-making branches in the urban metropolis. In such a scenario, the rural university, according to the UM3, found it difficult to swiftly respond to changes because they are dependent on the main campus and cannot take unilateral decision to respond to their problem by themselves. This scenario is regarded as “coloniality within.”

**Findings.** The study, therefore, finds out that the socio-economic and disadvantage-ness of the university stakeholders remains a challenge hindering the operations of the rural universities in South Africa. This finding further compliments people’s agitation for university decoloniality and transformation in South Africa. The outcome justified the argument of Dube and Puleng (2020) that the majority of the rural residences are marginalised and exposed to poor and inadequate availability of social and sustainable amenities. Hence, decloniality of rural universities is imperative to dismantle power relations and inequality in the distribution of national dividends to people regardless of their locations. This kind of decolnility will reproduce the current subjectivity, operation, and the perceived injustice (Kaunda, 2015) in South Africa rural universities.

### **Possible solutions to the challenges**

#### **Compulsory used of technological innovation within the university.**

From the general observation, experience, literature, and the data collected, the place of the internet of things and, in general, the technology in university education cannot be underestimated. This is to say that the place of technological innovation towards university activities and its teaching and learning is as important as the university itself. This suffixed in the findings of Morales, Nielsen, Bacarini, Martinelli, Kofuji & Díaz (2018) that ICT

facilities are the hub of sustainable development. This is not far from the suggestions made by the participants as recounted below;

UL1: There should be unavoidable teaching and learning of computer application technology (CAT) from high schools up to university level. Even evidence of ICT as a requirement when recruiting university lecturers will help

UL4: The rural universities must highly be equipped with innovative laboratories and hubs of developmental research. This would mean to improved labs to meet up with 4<sup>th</sup> IR standard paperless classrooms.

US5: Students must be equipped with a laptop, a tablet and a computable smartphone upon admission and that could be included in their student fees and or student loans.

The need for a compulsory ICT inclination in the university system reflected in the statement made by UL1 that there should be a system where the use of computer application technology be made compulsory for all lecturers and equitable for all other stakeholders at all levels of education. From the statement of the same lecturer, one could deduce that the university is not operating with full utilisation of ICT applications and devices. This is why he reiterated that it should be made as a prerequisite for recruiting university staff. On the order hand, the lecturers and others might be knowledgeable in the usage, but the availability of the ICT facilities is more fundamental. This reflected in the recommendation of UL4 that the university laboratories must be equipped to respond to the issue of non-availability as a result of disadvantage-ness in rural universities. Equipping rural university laboratories is not enough, but the place of students having the necessary devices also become necessary, as shown in the statement of US5 that the students needed to be provided with devices that could enable them to respond to changes coming he practices of 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution classrooms. Further to this, the place of training in usage is also important. See the statements below;

UM1: academics should be made to upload materials that will require fewer data to download, with fewer materials with videos.

US5: Universities must design access free/data free websites to place student activities. Even though this will still be a challenge for some students, but it will rich to a larger proportion of the students to continue working under the prevailing conditions.

UM4: Some students can be allowed to be on campus for the purpose of internet access. Controlled numbers, which adhere to the COVID 19 precautionary measures to be allowed on campus.

The place of the staff development programmes is imminent, and this is to compliment the above analysis that requires adequate knowledge of ICT as a recruitment requirement. This is to assume that many university staff appointed in the time past may not be familiar with the technological ways involves in teaching and learning. Maybe this is why UM1 stated that academics should make teaching materials in such a way that it will not cost students much data to download. This is not also far from the recommendation of US5 that the students should be provided with the data-free website to enable them to access university websites without internet data usage. Although according to the student, along with reality, provision of free data access to university websites may not solve the problem, it will at least made home learning easy for the more significant percentage of students. On the reality of COVID-19, the UM4 thought that the university could also enable students living nearby the university to access the university facilities during the lockdown. Yes, this is right. It still bothers the fact that the university must be up and doing with the use of technology to enable the university stakeholder to be familiar with the internet of things and to be able to respond to changes as it comes.

**Finding.** The study, based on this theme found out that the compulsory use of technology in rural university by the stakeholders such as lecturers and students will enhance their knowledge and thereby made them be aware of the ICT trajectories to teaching and learning most especially when there is need for emergency change like COVID-19. This finding could then be achieved in the system where all hands are on deck, that is, where there are collaboration and understanding among the people. This speaks to the fact that the rural university possesses the needed assets within themselves to respond to the social and economic change by emancipating themselves within the available resources (Kobayashi et al., 2020). This is in line with the conclusion

of Coleman et al. (2020) that using the assets-based approach in rural universities will uncover the resourcefulness of the people and enable them to construct solutions to their problem without external assistance.

**The need for contingency plan for/by the stakeholders.** In reference to the contingency of unknown conceptualised as the significant hindrance militating against rural universities to respond to the needed alternative to its operations, the participants in their view suggested that there is a need for an alternative plan, otherwise referred to as plan “B”. This is meant to enable the university to respond to change such as COVID-19 lockdown swiftly. The below statement covers;

UL2: In the planning world, there's something called PLAN B, i.e., planning for the unforeseen, even when you have a good initial plan you might still have to plan for what you don't know that might come your way in the process of carrying out your initial perfect plan.

UL3: So my students have shown me that the university needs to get up to date with current trends so that when situations like these arise, then we know we are covered.

US3: A situation analysis is necessary at every point, evolving with the developments and innovations in the global domain... The quality of the education should never be compromised, and it absolutely necessary that it is inclusive to all.

From the above statements, it is evidenced that there is a need for a rural university like the understudy to always ensure that there is a backup plan to its ways of “doing.” That is, where there are shortcomings in its original plans for productivity, will be able to redefine its ways to meet the pre-determined goals and objective. This, according to the UL3, will enable the system to still archives it aims amidst any contingencies. This is important, but US3 stated that it is not enough, except the alternatives (Plan B) accommodate all and sundry, that is, it must cater for all categories of students in the system. However, suggestions on the expected plan B were made, see the below;

UL5: Rural Universities should try to push for the implanting of Wi-Fi towers in their community and neighborhood to prepare for the

## 20 *Omodan – COVID-19 and Rural Universities*

4th IR; this will make students living in such community feel inclusive.

UL3: if we get used to using such approaches when we have to shut down the campus because of protests, we will have alternatives to making teaching and learning continue even if students are at home.

As a suggestion for the alternative to teaching and learning, UL5 believed that the university should install Wi-Fi towers in the university community to incorporate students living outside the campus into the world of the internet. This will enable them to respond to their academics like their counterparts on campus and in the urban settlement. By implication, the postulation of the Assets-based approach that the solutions to the people's problem lie within the system is justified. That is, the university possesses the needed assets to plan and re-plan itself by ensuring inclusivity in the system. By so doing, the hidden assets such as physical human, financial, and political assets to emancipate and "re-member" the disadvantaged students during emergencies and other contingencies (Omodan et al., 2019) will be espoused and utilised (Reardon, 2014). According to the UL3 will enable students to still meet up with any academic activities during an emergency like COVID-19 lockdown.

**Finding.** The finding here showed that there is a need for rural universities to plan for an alternative that could be used to replace their original plan should there be a need for such. This could be done by ensuring that students, lecturer, and university management who are the principal planners collaboratively ensure that the plans are all-inclusive and will enable the university to proceed amidst an emergency.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the above exploration, decolonising rural university from the trajectory of the contingency of unknown that affected its proactive-ness towards an alternative to its operations is inevitable. The conclusion, therefore, confirmed that low technology and innovative space in rural universities and students, lecturers and university's disadvantaged background were the major challenges responsible for agrarian universities to mitigate the lacuna of COVID-19 lockdown. This further justified and vindicate the quest for transformation and decoloniality in rural universities in South Africa. Also,

the compulsory use of technological innovation within the university and contingency plan for/by the stakeholders are concluded to be achievable with the use of ABA in rural universities. Based on this, efforts should be made by the tripartite, comprises of the government, the universities, and the community where the universities are domicile to boost enabling environment for imminent social change and sudden academic dynamism. That is;

- The government though Department of Higher Education and Training should ensure that there is adequate provision and educational facilities most especially to the rural located universities. This is will enable the students to have access to the needed materials to cope with 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom and virtual learning spaces. The lecturers will also be availed the needed to tool, knowledge and training to make use of the available innovation space and thereby improve the university productivity.
- The university management, being the custodian of academic activities should also perus their strength in terms of utilizing available resources meticulously to cater for the need of the university in terms of responding to emergency needs relating to teaching and learning in the system. The will empower the university to rely and depend on its human capital and capabilities towards productivities.
- Lastly, the spirit of ABA, that is, collaborative governance should be employed by involving the community in the university governance, this was confirmed by Omodan, Dube and Tsotetsi (2018) as having a positive relationship to university peace and productivity. In this sense, the community will also take share of the responsibility in ensuring that the university survive by providing some essential facilities such as internet café, libraries and laboratories, among others. Such collaborations is, therefore, in my argument an excellent road to rural transformation.

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