

# **Gordon Institute of Business Science**

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Learning from home: COVID-19 and the use of emergency remote education for  
executive MBA students

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**Abstract**

The advent of COVID-19 led to the disruption of normal face-to-face in person teaching methods and the rapid, forced adoption of previously rejected distance learning methods on a global scale. This forced adoption on led to a unique opportunity to examine experiences and retain learnings. Existing research focused mainly on reflective accounts of high school, ungraduated and other first time learners in the higher education environment. The objective of this research to examine the experiences of executive MBA students, who are likely to have different needs to younger less established learners and who experienced emergency remote education while learning from home. Through qualitative analysis of reflective accounts of executive MBA students, the challenging and beneficial experiences of students as well as the calls for retention of distance learning practices after the end of the pandemic were established. The study identified that different needs arise in the home environment leading to special challenges while learning form home in addition to a lack of peer interactions being identified as a severe inhibitor to learning. Beneficial experiences included more convenience from schedule flexibility and avoiding traffic while calls for retention of practices suggested that examinations and less interactive sessions, such as research workshops, remain online.

**Keywords**

COVID-19, executive MBA, emergency remote education, educational technology, distance learning

## **Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Saba Rahimi

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

Technology and its use in education is an established area of research that has persisted for several decades (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020) with the suggestion that moving pictures would change the field stretching as far back as the 1920s (Dreyfus, 1999). Despite excitement and many possible applications, there are many instances where online education was rejected in favour of traditional face-to-face methods (Mazzara et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2012). The advent of COVID-19 led to dramatic change in the use of technology within educational institutions as a result of the forced adoption (Chiu, 2022) in response to the pandemic. This research seeks to examine the challenging and beneficial experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to examining calls for retention of these previously rejected practices adopted in response to COVID-19. Literature relating to COVID-19 mainly examines areas for undergraduate or high school learners (Bond, 2021); therefore, the focus of this research will be placed on the special challenges and benefits experienced by executive Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students. This chapter provides an introduction to the research and motivates the need for careful examination into the experience of executive MBA students.

### **1.1 Research Purpose**

This research presents a case for an investigation into the effect of emergency remote education on executive MBA students in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this endeavour it seeks to examine the adoption and impact of both challenging and beneficial elements of distance learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be achieved by using existing literature around the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with established pre-COVID-19 distance learning literature to inform meaningful research questions. The research questions will assist in the production of a research instrument to be used as part of an exploratory, inductive thematic analysis. This section of the document begins by describing the research background, defining what is meant by executive MBA students and providing justification for the relevance of the research.



## **1.2 Research background and context of the study**

Early 2020 saw the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in an unprecedented impact on higher education (Conrad et al., 2022) with some estimates arguing that 1.5 billion students were affected worldwide (Oliveira et al., 2021). The result of the pandemic was that higher learning institutions had no choice but to abandon traditional face-to-face class room environments in favour of online or distance learning (Mishra et al., 2020).

This presented difficult circumstances where quick changes were made, within a narrow preparation window in forced (Chiu, 2022) and non-ideal circumstances (Hodges et al., 2020). These quick changes and the movement to online brought about a huge workload (Oliveira et al., 2021) that most institutions were not ready for (Conrad et al., 2022) and involved the use of previously rejected practices (Mazzara et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2012). COVID-19 essentially acted as a catalyst that forced institutions into rethinking education and more specifically technologies' role within education (Chiu, 2022).

While COVID-19 was generally regarded as a crisis and has been presented as a disruption to educational initiatives, there have been both challenging and beneficial experiences from online learning presented. Challenging experiences included great difficulties in evaluation and controlling evaluation fraud (Oliveira et al., 2021) and a lack of access to technology disproportionately effecting learners from lower social economic groups (Mishra et al., 2020; Ng, 2022). These experiences extended beyond the classroom to concerns about a lack of traditional campus support structures such as housing (Hodges et al., 2020), concerns about financial stability (Gillis & Krull, 2020), mental health concerns arising from a lack of belonging (Chiu, 2022), to existential questions about career choice demonstrated by Ng (2022) who highlighted that the aviation industry experienced enrolment concerns due questions about its future due to reduced travel demand.

There were also beneficial experiences. These were namely schedule flexibility, higher availability of teachers and learners being forced to open new communication channels (Oliveira et al., 2021).

Whether challenging or beneficial, various authors called for institutions to make a deliberate effort to retain and seek ways to apply the learnings from their response to the COVID-19 pandemic as part of their post COVID-19 teaching procedures (Hodges et al., 2020; Ng, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022).

### **1.3 Problem statement and a focus on executive MBA students**

In examining literature relating to higher education's response to COVID-19, it was found that most of the research focussed on high school, younger undergraduate or first time learners sharing accounts of their experiences (Bond, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020; Ng, 2022). In many instances, the sample involved analyses of learners completing their first higher educational experience. It is argued that many of the findings, which are presented in more depth in Chapter 2, may not be relevant or may differ when examining executive students completing postgraduate studies or Master's in Business Administration (MBA) programs. Executive MBA students, by nature, would not be at the onset of their educational endeavour, may have family commitments and are likely to be working professionals. The research therefore seeks to examine the experiences of emergency remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on executive MBA students who learned from home.

### **1.4 Significance and relevance of the study**

The significance and relevance of the research is argued by citing the unprecedented nature of the pandemic that effected 1.5 billion students worldwide (Oliveira et al., 2021). It is regarded as a once in a lifetime event (Hodges et al., 2020). Recent literature calls for an explicit and almost universal call for examination, application and retention of learnings of higher education's response to COVID-19 (Hodges et al., 2020; Ng, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022). While outlining the context of this research, it is argued that in this unique event, adoption was forced and involved the use of previously rejected methods on an unprecedented scale which should not go unexamined (Chiu, 2022; Mazzara et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2012); Oliveira et al., 2021).

### **1.5 Research setting and scope**

This research aims to conduct a qualitative analysis assessing the experiences of South African Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students who began their studies in 2020 or 2021. This sample and scope are proposed for two reasons. Firstly, as mentioned in section 1.3, an executive MBA student has a different profile and can be regarded as an established student as they would need to have some form of prior educational or work experience before enrolling. Therefore, their undertaking of an MBA would not be their first independent venture in tertiary education. Secondly, the decision to examine these specific years of students can be motivated as these students would have experienced COVID-19 online learning and it is possible that this would be their first experience of emergency remote education. While the 2020 group would have enrolled for face-to-face learning prior to the advent of COVID-19 and were forced into distance learning, the 2021 students would have been aware of COVID-19 and chose to enrol knowing that traditional face-to-face learning may not be implemented. Those who started their MBA programs in 2022 were not included as South African COVID-19 lockdown regulations eased during 2022. The national state of disaster ended shortly after the first quarter (Ramphosa, 2022).

### **1.6 Business and theoretical rationale**

Practical relevance of the study is argued by presenting the lessons learned to the institutions conducting executive MBA programs. These findings will go beyond course evaluations in seeking to provide insight beyond each course in isolation and rather evaluate the experience holistically. Furthermore, the unique opportunity to examine these students, who had different levels of willingness (Chiu, 2022) and exposure to online learning during different phases and severity of lockdowns can provide insight into combining elements for future enhancement of existing programs.

The research also has theoretical relevance as it will examine executive MBA students, those who are in a later stage of life and may have different motivations to undergraduate or first-time students. The literature reviewed contained many out of class limitations, such as lacking a sense of belonging (Chiu, 2022) or an inability to participate in sport and cultural activities (Hodges et al., 2020), which are less likely

to affect established students. In addition, the forced adoption (Chiu, 2022) of previously rejected techniques (Mazzara et al., 2022) were used to enable distance learning on a grand scale and it argued that this should not go unexamined.

This research therefore could present unique findings from a distinct sample of students which adds to the body of knowledge around online learning and emergency remote education literature. The research seeks to address the call for examination of challenging and beneficial experiences (Ng, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021) while also examining calls for retention (Hodges et al., 2020; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022) in the specific context of executive MBA students.

### **1.7 Definition of terms**

*Executive MBA student*: a student who is enrolled in an MBA, is more senior, not only in terms of years but who has already completed previous studies and may be working part time or full-time during studies.

*MBA*: Masters of Business Administration, a master's degree that normally requires previous work experience and an undergraduate degree as an enrolment requirement.

*Emergency remote education (ERE)*: defined in depth in section 2.2 of Chapter 2. In brief, education that involves unexpected distance learning as a result of an unforeseen circumstances.

### **1.8 Section Outline**

This section of the research introduced and provided a brief background of online educations and the effect of COVID-19 on higher education. A case for examination of the distinct sample of executive MBA students and their experience of online learning with the intention of providing lessons learned to higher learning institutions is argued, in turn adding to the theoretical body of knowledge. The next section reviews existing literature in more depth further presenting the context of the research and justification for its need. The literature survey will be followed by the research design and findings chapter.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of executive MBA students who experienced forced adoption of distance learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic during their studies. This section presents a review of the existing literature around the context of online and distance learning. It not only examines recent literature relating to COVID-19 and forced adoption distance education but also presents some sentiments from the established body of knowledge that examine historical attitudes toward the use of technology in education. Use of technology in education is an established area of research that spans back several decades (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; H. Dreyfus, 1999).

Both challenging and beneficial experiences as a result of completing education during the pandemic are presented. Most importantly, this section establishes a working definition for emergency remote education which differentiates educational activity during the pandemic from e-learning, distance learning and online learning. This working definition is used for the remainder of the research.

### **2.1 Education disrupted on a global scale**

Early 2020 saw the advent of COVID-19 with the World Health Organisation (WHO) classifying it as a pandemic on March 11<sup>th</sup> (Tison et al., 2020). This was a world-wide event as the virus had been reported in over 216 countries (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020). For many people, this was a life changing event with many sectors, and the educational sector in particular, heavily impacted (Mazzara et al., 2022). The severely impacted education system resulted in there being a need for forced (Chiu, 2022) rapid innovation (Soliman et al., 2022) and pivoting towards technology enabled teaching methods (Crawford & Cifuentes-Faura, 2022).

This unprecedented impact on education (Conrad et al., 2022) resulted in some estimates stating that as many as 1.5 billion students were affected worldwide (Oliveira et al., 2021). Responses to the pandemic varied with countries having different levels of restrictions. This ranged from full lockdowns, such as Italy where a 48.7% decrease in movement was noticed (Tison et al., 2020), to more relaxed

voluntary measures such as Sweden were only a 6.9% decrease in physical movement was observed (Tison et al., 2020). The result of the pandemic and restrictions on physical movement meant that higher learning institutions had no choice but to temporarily abandon traditional face to face class room environments in favour of forced online or distance learning (Mishra et al., 2020).

This presented difficult circumstances where quick changes were made, within a narrow preparation window in non-ideal circumstances (Hodges et al., 2020). These quick changes and the movement to online brought about a huge workload (Oliveira et al., 2021) that most institutions were not ready for (Conrad et al., 2022). COVID-19 essentially meant that institutions were forced to rethinking use of technology and its role within education (Chiu, 2022).

Crawford and Cifuentes-Faura (2022) identified that the crisis also led to a pausing or de-prioritisation of UN sustainable development goals (SDGs). An example of inclusive education was highlighted as problematic as universities were not prepared for online delivery of content resulting in students having to seek access to stable and reliable technology themselves. It was argued that the increased need for independence would disproportionately effect students from vulnerable student populations and lower socio-economic backgrounds (Crawford & Cifuentes-Faura, 2022). The pandemic also brought about existential questions about the future of some industries, such as aviation, (Ng, 2022) which effected student enrolment. Stewart and Lowenthal (2022) placed emphasis on the unwanted nature of the transition which resulted in significant changes in higher education (Oliveira et al., 2021) on an unprecedented scale not witnessed by anyone in education during their lifetimes (Hodges et al., 2020).

In summary, the pandemic has been established as an unprecedented, unwelcomed global event that caused great disruption to education with disproportionate effects on different parts of society. In the next section the response to the disruption is assessed and a definition for this response, emergency remote education is presented.

## **2.2 A response to disruption: defining emergency remote education**

While the word “catalyst” (Chiu, 2022) has been used to describe a change in educational institutions’ thinking in relation to technology and its role within education, it is argued that the actual execution and implementation of these measures may have been limited. Stewart and Lowenthal (2022, p. 274) described some of the responses to the COVID-19 as a “band-aid for a temporary injury” that were “on the fly” which lacked the maturity and were “far from the polished mature online courses intuitions traditionally offer.”

Practically speaking, it is argued that shifting to online learning involves more than simple digital recreation or duplication of learning materials (Conrad et al., 2022). An attitude of creating pressure to simply place things online is contradictory to the normal quality control involved in creating online courses (Hodges et al., 2020). In contrast, there must be recognition that course delivery needs to be adapted and that simple attempted replication of in person activity online is not effective (Gillis & Krull, 2020; Ng, 2022). Therefore the normal planning, careful design and development was not present in most of the emergency responses (Hodges et al., 2020). Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) echo this sentiment and argued that simply digitising online learning in response to COVID-19 should not be referred to as e-learning as migration in crisis methods adopted during the pandemic do not take cognizance of established models or theories for online education. In addition, there were some instances where emergency remote education included physical distribution of printed media (Bond, 2021) using remote delivery (Stewart et al., 2022).

In line with this thinking, Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) called for evaluation of the response to the COVID-19 crisis to be evaluated from the perspective of emergency remote teaching as opposed to online learning. Support for this notion, that online education was an inappropriate description was argued by many authors who defined the practices employed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as “emergency remote education” (Oliveira et al., 2021) and “emergency remote teaching” (Ng, 2022; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022).

Oliveira et al. (2021) argued that education in emergencies is a field that already exists but is more focused on damages to physical infrastructure affected by war,

famine and natural disasters. The advent of COVID-19 meant that, similar to the 2005 hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the path to move online was forced and not chosen (Gillis & Krull, 2020). The nature of the emergency and the constant mutations and lockdown duration uncertainty caused there being a need to seek new ways of engaging students at home (Bond, 2021). In such situations specific job responsibilities become fluid in response to circumstance (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2021) which results in discomfort as it would be impossible for everyone to involved to become immediate experts (Hodges et al., 2020). To amplify the discomfort there was a lack of capacity for training before the change to emergency remote teaching (Gillis & Krull, 2020) echoing the sentiments of the inadequacy of simply replicating face-to-face practices online (Conrad et al., 2022).

In previous sections the use of terms such as online learning, e-learning and distance learning in describing the practices employed by higher learning institutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is acknowledged. These terms were used during the introduction of the research and within this chapter up to this point. Usage of these terms will cease in favour of the creation and usage of a working definition of emergency remote education.

To conclude, a working definition of emergency remote education can be presented as:

“The use of technology to facilitate learning of a course that cannot be held in face-to-face format due to unplanned circumstances beyond the control of the learner or the institution facilitating the education”

There are various elements of this definition are derived from literature. The “*use of technology*” refers to the distance methods (Mishra et al., 2020) used due to the fact that normal “*face-to-face formats*” (Mishra et al., 2020) could not take place. The “*unplanned circumstances beyond the control*” was derived from the unwanted (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022), unprecedented (Hodges et al., 2020) and unprepared (Conrad et al., 2022) nature of the COVID-19 crisis.

The intention of this working definition is to provide a basis for understanding the response to COVID-19 for the purposes of this study. The intention is to use this



working definition to complete this study and establish some best practices which can be retained thereby answering the almost universal call to examine experiences and thereby enable a move from emergency to “sustained remote teaching” (Stewart et al., 2022). Practically this would involve reflection and application of learnings and making some of the emergency practices a standard offering.

Initially emphasis was placed on the learner being beyond control “and” the institution facilitating the education, but this was changed to “*learner or the institution facilitating the education.*” This was done to cater for instances where institutions and learners have differing restrictions such as the differing time zones, highlighted by Conrad et al. (2022) which resulted from exchange students being sent to their home countries.

### **2.3 Historical Pre-Covid Literature**

The unrepresented nature of the pandemic and its disruption was presented in section 2.1 with emergency remote education being identified and defined as the response in section 2.2. In this section, historical pre-COVID-19 research on distance learning is presented in addition to some literature related to the educational field.

It is argued that it is as important as education itself that a field exists independently of the study of technological applications and it is therefore important to understand traditional educational structures. Furthermore, many of the responses to COVID-19 involved forced adoption of previously rejected technology and teaching methodologies such as granular offerings made by massive open online courses (MOOC) (Mazzara et al., 2022). It is argued that understanding those reasons for rejection may be useful in understanding the emergency response to COVID-19 as an already established body of knowledge examining education and the use of technology in education span back several decades (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Dreyfus, 1999). These sentiments and thoughts even pre-date the internet with Thomas Eddison predicting that motion pictures would revolutionise education in 1922 and correspondence education being developed during the first industrial revolution (Mazzara et al., 2022).

### **2.3.1 The historic purpose of universities**

When examining the role of a university in society, Dreyfus (2001) presented an argument that universities had four initial primary purposes. Firstly, a university acted as a knowledge centre that could be a physical library to host books containing the world's knowledge. Secondly, universities provided a space where students could engage with the material and with each other about the knowledge available to them. Thirdly, universities were a validation system where students could be labelled as competent based on their qualification and the prestige of the university. Lastly, university campuses were a place where people could quietly contemplate. Dreyfus (2001) noted that the above explanation lacks reference to the needs of the learners or the process of being educated. One could further propose that core purpose of a university with a physical library is negated in a world where libraries of the world are available online, students can engage online, contemplate at home and be validated digitally, as they are by MOOCs or private sector certifications, without physically meeting.

While Dreyfus (2001) presented this historical notion, he went on to argue that such commercialised, consumerist attitudes towards education are inoperable if one seeks to advance knowledge beyond basic levels of competence development. Going beyond the education itself towards the context of education, Mazzara et al. (2022) went as far as to say that modern education was designed to cater for Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These contexts were both driven by the needs of the first industrial revolution and influenced by localised governments' agenda.

Dreyfus (2001) argues that learning involves more than consumption of knowledge in one context but rather subjective, emotionally involved risk bearing judgements and decisions to prioritise various factors within different social contexts. These risk bearing judgements results in being placed in positions that involve both positive and negative emotional experiences leading to development of "statistical discriminations" (Dreyfus, 2001, p.170) that serves to re-enforce or to rethink their approach to situations. Going beyond individual learning, Dreyfus (2001) argues that higher levels of competency can only be developed by experiencing apprenticeship under different masters thereby combining learnings and developing one's sense of

style. Such apprenticeship and learning cannot be achieved online without some form of “presence at a distance” or “telepresence” (Dreyfus, 2001, p. 173).

Dreyfus, S. (2004) concurs stating that early stages of development in skill acquisition can involve emotionally detached tasks involving rule and heuristic following but more advanced stages of competency development require emotional involvement and risk taking. Such risk taking will involve levels of commitment capturing the learners’ whole being (Dreyfus, 1999). This leads to the question of how emotionally involved one can be with education when sitting behind a terminal (Dreyfus, 2001) which is the subject of discussion in the next section.

### **2.3.2 Historical attitude toward online learning**

While some argue that the advent of COVID-19 and higher education’s response provided the world with an “unexpected digital revolution, speeding up universities digital transformation worldwide” (Ng, 2022, p.465) it is important to note the previously established sentiment that use of technology to enhance education is not a new phenomenon (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Conrad et al., 2022; H. Dreyfus, 2001; Mazzara et al., 2022). Therefore, pre-COVID-19 attitudes toward already established (Soliman et al., 2022) previously rejected (Mazzara et al., 2022) distance learning methods was explored. That is to say, an examination to publications prior to January 2020 was conducted, the findings of these papers are presented in this section.

To begin, the findings of Singh and Thurman (2019) are presented. In October 2019, mere months before the advent of COVID-19, the study examined literature relating to distance learning from 1988 to 2018 in search of definitions for the field. This search yielded 19 different terms used to describe online learning including: e-learning, computer-assisted instruction, e-tutoring and distributed learning. These varying definitions were assessed with technology being the strongest central element among all the definitions (Singh & Thurman, 2019). The technology involved in this meta-analysis of literature involved education over the internet as well as physical distribution of multimedia material such as CD-ROMs. It is argued that the findings of Singh and Thurman (2019) demonstrate additional motivation for the creation of the working definition of emergency remote education presented in

section 2.2 while also further demonstrating not only the established nature of the field of education and technology but also highlighting the vast perspectives of the field, demonstrated by a lack of consensus on a standard to name itself.

Selinger (2004, p.237), examined the effect of globalisation and distance learning finding that some learners found lessons “dull and uninspiring.” In addition, Hofstede’s power distance model was used to demonstrate limitations in attempts at creating a globally relevant learning experience. As explained by Ibarra (1996), some countries may have a culture of high uncertainty avoidance leading to calls for structure while others may embrace uncertainty as a means to promote creativity.

A practical example was presented by (Selinger, 2004) who contrasted South Africa and France and found that standard curriculum lead to differing outcomes with South Africa’s primary characteristics being infrastructure and ICT competence concerns, whereas the French approach was defined by the educational effort being primarily instructor led. Through this contrast it is inferred that differing needs of different contexts make the application of one global curriculum limiting.

Almost 15 years later, Stewart (2019) expressed similar concerns identifying a sub set of students as “transnational.” These students participated in learning in a country other than their country of residence leading to their falling through the metaphorical cracks due to cultural barriers and national cultural frames. Stewart (2019) went further to emphasise that such cultural barriers were not present when distance learning took place in one national context.

Stewart (2019) also stated that distance learning is normally prioritised among traditionally underserved communities which leads into the notions of Rahimi et al. (2012) that traditional face to face methods persisted in underprivileged communities despite many potential benefits of distance learning. Rahimi et al. (2012) identified potential benefits of distance learning, especially relevant in the South African context as: the elimination of the cost of transport, and saving the time taken to travel thereby breaking down historical distance from physical infrastructure from underprivileged communities.

The reasons for sub optimal implementation of distance learning included fears of dominant cultural paradigms being enforced on learners and an overemphasis on providing, or simply plugging in, infrastructure without symbiotic ventures creating meaningful empowerment (Rahimi et al., 2012). Lack of symbiotic ventures are caused by training usually being a once off endeavour, possessiveness of knowledge within schools, limitations on access to physical infrastructure and limitations on computer literacy skills. Many viewed new infrastructure supporting distance learning as an attachment to their schools, limited by massive amounts of red tape, rather than an organic part of their schools (Rahimi et al., 2012).

Several factors have been established as inhibitors to adoption of e-learning. These include Hofstede's power distance, cultural issues limiting the experience of transnational students and digital inequality, which relates both to physical infrastructure and computer literacy. The term "transactional distance" presented by Saba (2011) is presented as a comprehensive description of the limitations of distance learning.

Saba (2011) described transactional distance as being comprised of and influenced by learner-to-instructor, learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructional material interactions, arguing that dialog between these elements has an inverse relationship with transactional distance. In essence, more dialog means less transactional distance and a more enhanced learning experience.

An analogy of radio communication can be used to describe the transactional distance described by Saba (2011). One-way radio based education, which was criticised in the 1940s, as being limited due to its inability to adjust to the needs to individual students and educators carrying the additional burden of having to become producers and create content for radio (Saba, 2011). A parallel between the concerns about radio in the 1940s and the experience of Zoom or Microsoft Teams in 2020 can be argued. Learner-to-instructor interactions changed, learner-to-learner interactions (not possible with radio) changed and interactions with instructional material also changed.

Strecker et al. (2018), although not explicitly agreeing with Saba (2011), argued a similar sentiment that flipping class rooms with the intention of reducing one directional lecturing approaches and encouraging a more facilitative approach, thereby enhancing learner to instructor dialog, where inhibited by learners' inability to be self-regulated. In addition, while business simulations, in the context of ERE learning, were very stimulating, they were often limited due to their requiring technical knowledge not normally available to general academic member of staff in a university. This effectively limits learner to instructional material dialog (Strecker et al., 2018).

In summary, the field of technology enabled distance learning is one that does not have a distinct identify demonstrated by the various names used to define and describe it (Singh & Thurman, 2019). In examining historical attitudes towards online learning, it was found that globally applied curriculum can be limiting to different cultural context with transnational students being limited. A focus on underprivileged learners identified possible unrealised benefits such as the elimination of travel distance and travel time. Lastly, the problematic one-way nature of interactions, as described by the analogy of a radio, combined with the additional requirement to understand technical platforms and become content producers were shown to be historical inhibitors to online learning.

#### **2.4 Emergency remote education and COVID-19**

Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 reviewed the existing literature establishing the globally disruptive scale of the pandemic, presented a working definition of emergency remote education, examined literature prior to COVID-19 and found various inhibitors to previous efforts and inconsistency in interpretations evidenced by a wide range of definitions and names within the general field of technology enabled education. In this section, the literature relating to emergency remote education and its use in response to COVID-19 is examined. Both challenging (section 2.4.1) and beneficial (section 2.4.2) elements are presented in addition to a call for retention of learnings (section 2.4.3). Where the previous section only consulted literature prior to January 2020, this section only sought out literature from 2020, 2021 and 2022 which were published after the start of the pandemic.

### **2.4.1 Challenging experiences**

While some institutions may be proud of their rapid response to the challenges of COVID-19, Gillis and Krull (2020) stress the importance to assess not only the effectiveness of responses to COVID-19 but also the barriers faced during emergency remote education. This section therefore presents the more challenging experiences and negative sentiments as a result of emergency remote education during COVID-19.

#### **2.4.1.1 Lack of an ecosystem**

The nature of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that learners and educators were asked to isolate and keep their distance not only from each other, from their educations but also from the learning infrastructure of their institutions. Hodges et al. (2020) argues that the nature of this isolation meant that learners were not simply required to learn online but were removed from the traditional support structures created by university campuses specifically designed to support learning.

This metaphorical ecosystem included elements such as housing, career services, health services, orientation, sporting and cultural activities (Hodges et al., 2020) as well as student psychological and mental health services (Toquero, 2020). Removal of the learner from this environment combined with the uncertainty of the pandemic led to wider life stresses ranging from housing insecurity to financial instability (Gillis & Krull, 2020) with their being a greater impact on learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have access to the necessary bandwidth and devices (Chiu, 2022). As mentioned previously, Ng (2022) identified an additional challenge facing the aviation industry that saw unique enrolment challenges where learners questioned the future of aviation globally due to a lack of air travel demand.

The lack of this metaphorical eco-system was identified as problematic by (Mazzara et al. (2022) who argued that out of class interactions, through sport and social activities, which resulted in human networking, were essential in providing a full rounded experience. Although Mazzara et al. (2022) argued that online education seemed to be more in favour of introverted individuals, providing a sense of divine justice in a world that seems to favour extroverted individuals, concern was raised

that isolated and cocoon learning is not sustainable and swinging too far in an opposite direction in favour of introverts is not productive.

Stewart & Lowenthal (2022) presented an extreme case of ecosystem removal citing the example of international students who had chosen exchange programs. While an exchange student would normally experience difficulties in orientation, language barriers, cultural differences and home sickness, these difficulties were amplified by the removal of normal orientation and welcome procedures which led to their experience being disproportionately negative. A sad irony was evident where learners who had found the courage to pioneer to a new environment, in a new country, with a different culture in unknown territory were robbed of out of class experiences while being forced to remain in mostly empty dormitory accommodation. This extreme case demonstrates that it is impossible to argue that remote learners are exposed to the same experience and opportunities during the pandemic (Flaherty, 2020). This led to a call for emphasis on mental health (Gillis & Krull, 2020; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022) as well as peer support and deliberate online interaction to create a stronger sense of belonging (Chiu, 2022).

Mazzara et al. (2022) introduced a unique point around the Greek concept of *oikos* which highlights the importance of the sacredness of the home environment and family dynamics. With the home environment being separate from the work environment, a possible blurring of the separation could constitute a violation of the home environment and create issues of self-management and disruption to the home metaphorical ecosystem. This ties into the title of the research as, while emergency remote education is being examined, the experiences of people who learned from home is also being examined. Such a concern may be more relevant to MBA students, who would be more likely to have work and family responsibilities as opposed to isolated students in dormitories. In addition, it is noted that MBA students usually operate from a separate campus leading to a question being raised about their usage of facilities and the supportive campus ecosystem.



#### **2.4.1.2 In class interactions & motivational stimulation**

A lack of motivation due to not meeting in person was identified as problematic (Gillis & Krull, 2020) with online or recorded sessions not replicating the feeling of being present socially in the same place and never providing “the feeling of being socially present in the same space as other students and the instructor” (Conrad et al., 2022, p. 550).

While education can be enhanced by theatrical communication, it is difficult to facilitate such meaningful interaction when an educator cannot read the mood of the learners and be unaware of the level of participation (Mishra et al., 2020). The lack of facial expressions, due to camera’s being off most of the time, added to the great difficulty in reading the mood of a class (Oliveira et al., 2021). Ng (2022) stressed the need for face contact as important for motivation around the context of the lesson, arguing that teaching in a blended mode provided higher ratings for self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and self-determination around career interest. Paudel (2021, p. 84) provided evidence for disciplinary issues in their identification of time management and “more freedom that I can handle” as the top two challenges faced during emergency remote education. Li (2022) also identified time management issues and social media distraction as major challenges.

A higher burden of self-responsibility was also identified by Mazzara et al. (2022) who argued that this resulted in a requirement for more discipline to participate in online interactions. Often being in isolation and not commuting resulted in learners approaching interactions in a “lazy way” which involved them not dressing up and making mental switch to a learning environment (Mazzara et al., 2022, p. 12). This lack of a switch is problematic with social interaction being central to increase motivation, reduce stress and increase satisfaction of the learning experience (Conrad et al., 2022). This lead to a call for intentional design to improve social interactions even if such social interactions occur online (Conrad et al., 2022).

In relation to executive MBA students, this research seeks to explore if these challenges would affect executive MBA students. While they may not feel socially present due to operating with web cameras turned off, it could be questioned if their

intrinsic motivation would be inhibited given that they are most likely independent adults who chose independently to complete a postgraduate degree.

#### **2.4.1.3 Technical inhibitors and limitations**

Technical limitations and inhibitors were divided into three categories. The first involved a lack of access to, or inadequate technical equipment. It was argued previously that traditional university campuses provide a metaphorical ecosystem for learning that was not replicated online. People from low socio-economic backgrounds were therefore at more of a disadvantage due to a lack of access to necessary equipment including devices and stable internet (Mishra et al., 2020) or device inadequacy (Ng, 2022).

The second technical limitation involved failure of technical equipment, such as line failure, server failure or poor connections (Gillis & Krull, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021). Once again, the metaphorical ecosystem of a university would normally provide an environment where people could utilise standard equipment. This standardisation would enable fair and equal treatment in the event of campus equipment failure. With a distributed learner and educator body, each using their own equipment, individual cases of technical failures effecting continuity would be more difficult to prove.

The third limitation involved a computer literacy skills deficit (Conrad et al., 2022) and perceptions of difficulty of use (Chiu, 2022; Conrad et al., 2022) acting as an inhibitor to effective emergency remote education. Li (2022) identified the adaptation to new technology and a new learning style as the biggest challenge during the advent of emergency remote education. Further analysis revealed that even those who came to terms with the new technology and new methodologies experience “techno stress” and “technology fatigue” (Conrad et al., 2022, p. 540).

In relation to the executive MBA, student a question could be raised if executive MBA students, would suffer from these limitations. While technostress and fatigue can affect everyone, the fact that executive MBAs could be working professionals leads to a question of whether they would struggle with issues such as lack of equipment

and computer literacy support normally provided by undergraduate support structures.

#### **2.4.1.4 Integrity and cyber security**

While not strictly a barrier but rather a consequence, Oliveira et al. (2021) identified control of student evaluation, possible fraud and preventing unethical student behaviour as the biggest challenge in managing emergency remote education. Leo et al. (2021) argued that cheating was easier due to the open book nature of the exams. This areas was not explored deeply but found that a call for flexibility of deadlines (Gillis & Krull, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020) and alternative evaluation criteria was present in the literature. Hodges et al. (2020) stressed the need to be mindful of circumstances while assessing teaching evaluations, arguing that it would not be fair to apply the same standards. Flaherty (2020) observed that half of research participants lowered their expectations, creating concern about readiness for the job market.

Oliveira et al. (2021) identified a carefree, oblivious attitude towards cyber security. Leo et al. (2021) also identified the distributed educator and learner force, away from the normal university infrastructure, as more at risk of cybercrime. This falls outside of the scope of the research but is of concern and could be the subject of further research.

#### **2.4.1.5 Section summary & research question 1 formulation**

This section presented various challenging experiences, most were derived from studies on younger students, ranging from a lack of access to traditional campus supportive infrastructure, limitations of in class interactions due to distance methods, as well as technical issues relating to devices, connectivity and technical literacy. It has been argued that executive MBA students may have different needs. This leads to the development of the first research question:

*“What challenging experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education while learning from home?”*

## **2.4.2 Beneficial experiences**

Although the pandemic by definition was a crisis, Oliveira et al. (2021) was not alone in finding and presenting both challenges, as those described in section 2.4.1, and beneficial experiences from the forced adoption of emergency remote education in response to COVID-19. This section examines literature relating to positive development and sentiments experienced as a result of education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2.4.2.1 Responsiveness**

Some of the beneficial elements included teachers being more available to take questions faster (Oliveira et al., 2021) and for learners to benefit from getting feedback and comments faster (Ng, 2022). This suggests some efforts involved regarding the changes in responsibility identified by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) and demonstrates the sentiments presented in section 2.2 that effective emergency remote education involves more than simply placing material online. This responsiveness was identified as beneficial from the perspective of the learners, however, Soliman et al. (2022) advised caution as there were instances of teacher burnout due to increased demand.

### **2.4.2.2 Asynchronous learning and inclusion**

While tools such as Zoom were used extensively, they were not universally praised over the use of asynchronous teaching methods (Gillis & Krull, 2020) which involve use of pre-recorded lectures enabling review of content on demand and online discussion forums (Conrad et al., 2022; Ng, 2022). These methods also involved non-online means such as printed media (Bond, 2021) and physical distributed through remote delivery (Stewart et al., 2022). The use of asynchronous tools provided flexibility to learn at the learners own pace (Ng, 2022) while facilitating autonomy (Gillis & Krull, 2020) and catering for exchange learners who were in different time zones due to being sent home due to the pandemic (Conrad et al., 2022).

#### **2.4.2.3 Lack of cognitive overload**

Conrad et al. (2022, p. 539) raised concern that cognitive overload from overstimulation from diverse sources would cause disorientation and that communication overload would result in instances where the “primary task is suspended”. Contrary to initial expectations, it was found that the increase in communication did not overload learners or distract them from their primary tasks. It was further argued that there was increased communication from the increased social presence of the lecturer (Conrad et al., 2022).

#### **2.4.2.4 Flexibility and lower admin costs**

There were also lower barriers to participation with less admin costs involved in organising events as webinars and online sessions did not involve physical venues and catering (Ng, 2022). Practically, these admin costs were lower for the organisers (Ng, 2022) but also lower for participants. Affordability was a major benefit with transport costs to and from the venues as well as campus accommodation costs being reduced or eliminated (Mazzara et al., 2022). Although no explanation for causation was provided, Soliman et al. (2022) identified a significant increase in the number of enrolments during the pandemic leading to questions being raised about motivating factors.

While Ng (2022) identified beneficial flexibility in the actual exercise of learning as a result of asynchronous teaching material, Mazzara et al. (2022) identified flexibility in one’s personal schedule, for both learners and educators, as a major benefit of emergency remote education most derived from the independence of one’s location leading to enhanced accessibility and reduced commuting. Mazzara et al (2022) also identified the area of evaluation and assessment, which took place in the online format as an area which could see permanent change with more granular assessment during a course possibly leading to reduced importance of final exams.

#### **2.4.2.5 Mental health awareness**

Moving beyond the class room, Toquero (2020) highlighted that while mental health issues among students are established as important, the universal all-encompassing nature of the crisis provided an opportunity to enhance access to encourage more

universal adoption of mental health services. Mazzara et al. (2022) also argued that the learnings from the response to the pandemic will result in more use of open resources for education enhancing accessibility, more prioritisation for professional development in the area of digital education for teaching and most importantly, as a result of the loss of peer-to-peer contact, more emphasis being placed on collaborate projects creating a sense of community among learners.

#### **2.4.2.6 Section summary & research question 2 formulation**

In summary, the beneficial aspects of emergency remote education involve more free time as a result of not being required to commute, the flexibility to connect from any location, but also at any time through the use of multiple asynchronous tools and methods. These factors combine to lead to a lower cost involved in undertaking educational activities. It is noted that most studies involved assessment of younger undergraduate students. The research seeks to examine the experiences of executive MBA students who are at a later stage of their educational journeys and may therefore have different needs. This leads to the development of the second research question:

*“What beneficial experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education while learning from home?”*

### **2.5 Calls for examination and retention**

Section 2.1 established the COVID-19 as an unprecedented global disruption to education. In section 2.2 various authors thoughts on the institutional responses to the pandemic were presented. A working definition of emergency remote education was also established with the intention of replacing terms such as online learning, e-learning or distance learning. This was followed by section 2.3 that dealt with historical pre-COVID-19 literature relating to distance learning and section 2.4 which dealt with challenging and beneficial experiences of emergency remote education. Having examined the literature it was noted that there was a presence of a call for further examination and retention of learnings from this unique event where adoption was forced (Chiu, 2022) on an unprecedented scale (Oliveira et al., 2021).

Evidence of a presence of call for retention was ample and involved a need to examine and retain the learnings of the emergency remote education during COVID-19. Ng (2022) and Stewart and Lowenthal (2022) argued that going back to old pre-pandemic methods would be a waste of learnings as the lesson learned from the crisis could enhance traditional teaching methods.

While Stewart et al. (2022, p. 172) described these solutions as “creative solutions engineered in response to a complex problem in an unstable context”, Whittle et al. (2020) identified that educational responses to the pandemic were rapidly developed with the intention of temporary use. Whittle et al. (2020) argued that while temporary, other disruptions such as active shooters, wild fires or further pandemics could happen again justifying a need to evaluate the experience. Oliveira et al. (2021) concurred arguing that the lessons from the COVID-19 emergency remote education can be applied in different context while Hodges et al. (2020) advise caution and stress the need to keep the learnings, arguing that there are likely to be more health and safety concerns in the future.

Williamson et al. (2020) went as far as to describe the responses to the pandemic as experimentation where the social actors, such as learners, teachers and parents, are laboratory subjects having different experiences each requiring observation and study to provide insights to the educational technology industry. A particular area of interest was possible solutions to address the identified inequalities between students from different social economic groups given their inability to sustain temporary emergency remote education solutions.

Whether their lessons were challenging or beneficial, there was evidence of calls for emergency remote education to share “more characteristics with traditional online courses” where planning and development are more feasible (Stewart et al., 2022, p. 188). Other authors concurred calling for institutions to make a deliberate effort to retain and seek ways to apply the learnings from their response to the COVID-19 pandemic as part of their post COVID-19 teaching procedures (Hodges et al., 2020; Ng, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022).

### **2.5.1 Section summary and research question 3 formulation**

In summary, the various calls to examine the experience and retain lessons learned imply a need to reflect, with introspection, on the use of these previously rejected methodologies and practices. As argued in formulation of research question 1 and research question 2, the purpose of the research is to examine the specific insights and experiences of executive MBA students and not undergraduates or first-time learners. This leads to the development of the third research question:

*“What elements of emergency remote education should be retained in executive MBA programs after the pandemic?”*

### **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a literature review presenting some views relating to the educational fraternity’s response to the pandemic. The literature review began by establishing the global scale of the crisis (section 2.1). It then presented some responses to the pandemic and established a working definition of emergency remote education (section 2.2). Section 2.3 presented historical, pre-January 2020 literature on distance education. Section 2.4 then presented post-January 2020, COVID-19 related literature that identified both challenging and beneficial sentiments towards emergency remote education. This resulted in the formulation of two research questions relating to the challenging and beneficial experiences of executive MBA students while learning from home. Section 2.5 then presented further literature calling for retention of learnings leading to the formulation of a third research question which seeks out explicit calls for retention of practices after the end of the pandemic. The following Chapter presents these three research questions. This is followed by Chapter 4 which describes the research design and methodology.



## **Chapter 3 – Research Questions**

As argued in the introduction to this research, the literature focussed primarily on students enrolled in undergraduate courses, at the start of their higher education, or on students enrolled in school. It was therefore argued that there is a need for an investigation into the effect of emergency remote education on executive MBA students who learned from home. These students would have already completed their first higher educational experience, would be working professionals, possibly have families and may have different motivations or needs. This differentiation is in line with the topic of the research: “Learning from home: COVID-19 and the use of emergency remote education for executive MBA students.” The working definition of emergency remote education remains as: “the use of technology to facilitate learning of a course that cannot be held in face-to-face format due to unplanned circumstances beyond the control of the learner or the institution facilitating the education.” This chapter presents three research questions were derived from completing the literature survey.

### **3.1 Research Question 1 – Challenges of ERE for MBA students**

Section 2.4.1 of the previous chapter presented numerous challenging sentiments toward education during the pandemic. Examining some of the challenges identified resulted in the questions being raised about their relevance in relation to executive MBA students.

For example, it was identified that the normal campus support metaphorical ecosystem of support structures (Hodges et al., 2020), access to necessary equipment (Mishra et al., 2020) or devices (Ng, 2022) as well a lack of peer support leading to a weaker sense of belonging were identified as inhibitors to the learning experience (Chiu, 2022). These areas were a very limited subset of the challenges identified for the MBA students in this study. It is however argued that this is illustrative of different motivations as it is questioned if executive MBA students, who are usually at a separate campus would use the normal campus support systems. In addition, it was questioned if executive MBA students would struggle with equipment or devices given their position as working professionals in possession of

undergraduate degrees and if they would be as reliant on peer support and a need for a similar sense of belonging. This led to the development of the first research question:

*“What challenging experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education while learning from home?”*

### **3.2 Research Question 2 – Benefits of ERE for MBA students**

Section 2.4.2 of the previous chapter presented numerous positive sentiments and beneficial experiences as a result of education during the pandemic including increased autonomy (Gillis & Krull, 2020), lower costs for organisers, higher accessibility (Ng, 2022), cost elimination and reduction for learners (Mazzara et al., 2022). Flexibility (Ng, 2022) and the increased use of asynchronous teaching methods (Gillis & Krull, 2020) was also identified as beneficial. These findings were surprising given the known aversion of younger students to opt for online education (Christensen et al., 2016). Given the focus of the research on executive MBA students, there is a need to examine beneficial experiences from their perspective. Therefore, the second research question is established as:

*“What beneficial experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education while learning from home?”*

### **3.3 Research Question 3 – Calls for retention by MBA students**

Lastly, section 2.5 called for examination and retention of the learnings of the response to the pandemic with multiple authors calling for examination and reflection justifying this position by stating that lessons learned can be applied in different context (Oliveira et al., 2021) and in other non-pandemic related disruptions such as wild fires and shootings (Whittle et al., 2020). Stewart and Lowenthal (2022) went as far as to state that a return to normal teaching methods would be wasteful. While other studies examined challenges and benefits and induced which elements should be retained, a third research question which addresses explicit calls for retention of emergency remote education practices was formulated. The third research question is presented as:

*“What elements of emergency remote education should be retained in executive MBA programs after the pandemic?”*

## **Chapter 4 – Research Design**

The previous chapter presented two research questions relating to the specific needs and experiences of executive MBA students arising from emergency remote education. A third research question also seeks to examine which practices faced calls for retention after the end of the pandemic. This chapter presents the proposed research design and methodology in completing the research.

### **4.1 Choice of research topic**

In examining literature relating to higher education's response to COVID-19, it was found that most of the research focussed on younger undergraduate learners sharing their accounts of their experiences. In many instances the sample involved analyses of learners completing their first higher educational experience. It is argued that many of the findings may not be relevant or may differ from the niche focus of examining executive MBA students who are completing postgraduate studies. In this endeavour three research questions were identified:

1. "What challenging experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education while learning from home?"
2. "What beneficial experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education while learning from home?"
3. "What elements of emergency remote education should be retained in executive MBA programs after the pandemic?"

### **4.2 Relevance of the research topic**

As identified in the introduction to this research an established body of knowledge examining use of technology in education spans back several decades (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Dreyfus, 1999). Literature prior to COVID-19 identifies many reasons for the rejection of distance methods (Dreyfus, 1999, 2001; Mazzara et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2012). It is therefore argued that this unique event, where adoption was forced (Chiu, 2022) on an unprecedented scale (Oliveira et al., 2021) should not go unexamined.

This argument is supported by the academic literature relating to COVID-19 and education where presence of an explicit and almost universal call for examination, application and retention of learnings are present (Hodges et al., 2020; Ng, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022). The unprecedented nature can be quantified by the fact that the pandemic effected 1.5 billion students worldwide (Oliveira et al., 2021) which is truly a once in a lifetime event (Hodges et al., 2020).

### **4.3 Choice of methodology**

As mentioned in the literature survey, the COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented effect on the education system (Mishra et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021). It is argued that the unprecedented nature of the event and subsequent responses to the crisis make adoption of an exploratory study into the effects of COVID-19 on learners appropriate.

Casula et al. (2021) describe exploratory research as a process which involves struggles and surprises similar to a baby taking their first steps in unknown territory, leading to creative resolution and new discovery. Saunders & Lewis (2018, p. 115) present a similar description of exploratory research also stating that it involves asking “new questions.” While it is argued that the research into the field of emergency remote education is not new, the unprecedented disruption to higher education led to an acknowledgement of the need for exploration into the unprecedented event is being evaluated.

Once exploration of the uncharted territory is complete, an interpretivist philosophy will be followed. This is motivated by Nordqvist et al. (2009) who describe interpretivist as concerned with social, economic and political matters. As education is central to social, economic and political progress the effects of such an unprecedented event must be interpreted. Nordqvist et al. (2009) argue that interpretivism can be used as a building block for new theory development and building blocks for further research which is in line with the research purpose of attempting to contribute to the body of knowledge. The exploratory nature of the study mean that future research will be needed which make an interpretivist philosophy appropriate. Furthermore, Saunders and Lewis (2018, p. 109) describe interpretivist philosophy as one that understands “differences between humans in

their role as social actors.” As established in the literature, the intention of the research is to uncover experiences of established executive MBA learners who learned from home as opposed to first time learners. This is connected to the title of the research and the Greek concept of *oikos*, or the sacred nature of the home that Mazzara et al. (2022), introduced in the literature review. It is suggested that new dynamics could form in the home environment while learning from home.

The study will be cross sectional instead of longitudinal. This is because the learners will be asked to reflect on their experiences at one point in time, or at a “snapshot” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, p.200), and won’t be asked to about their experiences at multiple points in time.

As the territory is mostly uncharted due to the unprecedented forced adoption of emergency remote education, an inductive approach will be used where the findings will be formed by building theory from the “bottom up” (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p.113). Literature will not be used to form any theories prior to data collection so that the research can be exploratory in nature. This will involve analysing the collected data as a metaphorical “blank slate” (Naumovska & Zajac, 2022, p. 374) where patterns are observed and those patterns are used to develop theory which can be used for further research. Engaging with the exploratory sample will involve unstructured observation and semi-structured or unstructured interviews deemed appropriate by Saunders and Lewis (2018). This engagement will involve semi-structured interviews where data will be collected for the purposes of the research.

In summary, an exploratory, qualitative and inductive approach will be used to evaluate the responses of learners through semi-structured interviews in a cross-sectional analysis of experiences of executive MBA students in emergency remote education and learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **4.4 Population**

Saunders & Lewis (2018, p.138) identify the population as the entire set of “group members”. Although Oliveira et al. (2021) argued that 1.5 billion learners were effected worldwide, the scope of this research focusses on executive MBA students

rather than first time exposure to higher learning, and time constraints mean that a only a sample of learners can be evaluated. A choice was therefore made to focus on any South African learners who were enrolled in an MBA program during 2020, 2021 or 2022 as part of the population. Executive MBA students who began their studies in 2022 will not be included as South African lockdown regulations eased and the national state of disaster was lifted shortly after the end of the first quarter of the academic year on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 (Ramphosa, 2022).

#### **4.5 Unit of Analysis**

Any entity that a researcher seeks to analyse or provide commentary on can be thought of as a unit of analysis (DeCarlo, 2018). DeCarlo (2018) also argues that this entity could involve analysis of organisations as whole, group of people or individuals with each component being the unit. As the research will be qualitative, exploratory, inductive and focussed on established executive MBA students and their experiences of emergency remote education and learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is argued that the unit of analysis will be individual executive MBA students.

#### **4.6 Sampling method and size**

The literature identified that as many as 1.5 billion students would have been effected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Oliveira et al., 2021). Due to time constraints a reduced sample of this population was chosen and will include of only those individuals who were registered for an MBA at any South African university during the 2020, 2021 and 2022 academic years. Students who registered for their first year of MBA studies in 2022 were excluded as South African lockdown regulations eased shortly after the first quarter (Ramphosa, 2022). Non-probability purposive volunteer sampling will be used. This is motivated by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2016b) argument that purposive volunteer sampling is suited to exploratory research.

It is acknowledged that that purposive sampling will involve making subjective judgements in purposely seeking a sample (Saunders et al., 2016b). No willing participants will be excluded. Ideally, the qualitative exploratory analysis should continue until a point of saturation (Saunders et al., 2016b; Saunders & Lewis, 2018), however the time constraints and guidelines from Saunders et al. (2016b) led to the

creation of a minimum target of 20 qualitative semi-structured interviews regardless of perceptions of saturation.

Inequalities in society are acknowledged. These have been found to limit a learner's ability to embrace distance learning (Mishra et al., 2020; Rahimi et al., 2012). With these limitations it would seem logical that quota sampling be used to divide respondents into different socio-economic groups. This has not been done as the focus of the research is not on access but rather on executive MBA students who would already have completed some form of tertiary education or have completed some form of work experience.

#### **4.7 Measurement Instrument**

The exploratory research will involve qualitative analysis of reflective accounts of executive MBA learners who were forced into emergency remote education and who learnt from home. Roberts' (2020) guidelines for novice qualitative researchers were taken into account. These guidelines state that high quality, strong questions must be developed to support the exploratory nature of the study. This process must allow for flexibility in the structure of the interviews to allow for open responses (Roberts, 2020).

While rigidity is discouraged, open ended and open questions seeking to draw out experiences may lead to probing of responses. It is recognised that there is danger in a researcher forcing their experience on a respondent. The interview process will seek to follow guidelines of Roberts (2020) to ensure that the respondent can express their own experience freely. Critical to this was the successful obtaining of ethical approval before usage of the research instrument as well as the separation of initiation questions to ensure any respondent is aware of their rights. No revisions were made to the research instrument following a pilot phase and therefore no supplementary ethical approval was sought.

Table 1 provides a summary of the research instrument used. Question 1 to 5 were used simply to categorise the respondents and ensure their eligibility. Question 6 was aligned to research question 1 which is concerned with challenges relating to

emergency remote education. Question 6 was asked with the intention of the respondent freely expressing those challenges experienced as a result of emergency remote education. Question 6.1 to 6.4 were then asked to illicit responses and seek elaboration relating to the specific areas of in class interactions, administrative experiences, exam preparation and group work. Question 7 was aligned to research question 2 which is concerned with the beneficial experiences emerging from emergency remote education. Questions 7.1 to 7.4 were then asked to illicit responses and seek elaboration relating to the specific areas of in class interactions, administrative experiences, exam preparation and group work.

*Table 1 : Research Instrument*

Number	Question
1	Name & Surname
2	Which year did you start your MBA?
3	Was your MBA your first experience of emergency remote learning?
4	When you registered for your MBA did you anticipate that some sessions would be remote?
5	Did you spend most of your time attending class while at home?
6	What challenges did you face while learning from home?
6.1	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference to the classroom experience?
6.2	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference to exam preparation?
6.3	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference to administrative tasks?
6.4	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference group work?
7	What benefits did you feel you enjoyed while learning from home?
7.1	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference to the classroom experience?
7.2	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference to exam preparation?
7.3	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference to administrative tasks?
7.4	Can you elaborate on your answer above with specific reference group work?
8	Given the option of learning from home or attending face to face classes which would you chose and why?
9	Are there any elements of courses that you think should remain online?
10	Are there any elements of courses that you think should always be in a face-to-face classroom?
11	Where there any out of classroom inhibitors, other than technical problems, to your participating while learning from home?
12	Was syndicate conflict resolution more effective in person or with distance methods?
13	When presenting to the class did you prefer in person or distance methods and why?
14	Open question. Reflecting on this experience, what should be preserved or retained from this experience?

After the fifth interview in the pilot, it was observed that challenges and benefits were being expressed at the same time. In the spirit of iterative research approaches, the interview process was changed to allow respondents to give context and ask them to hold off expressing beneficial experiences until question 7. This request was done by reminding the respondent of freedom of expression and that their responses must



not be influenced by the interviewer and that the request is simply to provide more structure to the responses.

Questions 8, 9, 10 and 14 were aligned to research question 3, relating to the retention of practices executed during emergency remote education. Questions 12 and 13 were targeted questions to draw out more information relating to peer-to-peer class interactions beyond benefits and challenges of group work. Lastly, given the abundance of papers identifying technical disruptions question 11 sought to explicitly ask about non-technical disruptions.

#### **4.8 Data Gathering Process**

After the completion of the GIBS ethical approval process, executive MBA students were approached and asked if they would like to participate in an in-depth semi structured interview. A critical part of this process involved steps being taken to ensure that participants are aware of their rights, in line with ethical guidelines from the University, and were put at ease to freely express themselves (Roberts, 2020).

#### **4.9 Analysis Approach**

In line with the exploratory nature of the research Lindgreen et al. (2021) observe, bridge and challenge model (OBC) was examined. Observe, in this context involves observation of real life situations and formulating research that seeks to understand phenomenon (Lindgreen et al., 2021). Bridging involves examination of multiple disciplines with an intentional effort to draw out new insights (Lindgreen et al., 2021). Challenge in this context involves examining existing literature and studies and contesting their assumptions (Lindgreen et al., 2021).

It is argued that this research involves observation of a new phenomenon namely, the unprecedented nature of the pandemic. In addition, it is argued that the research bridges two disciplines. This is because it involves study of executive MBA students and their forced adoption of technology enabled education. The bridging is therefore between the two disciplines of education and technology. Lastly, it is argued that the research does not involve challenging existing theories due to its exploratory and inductive nature.

The new territory, combined with the multidisciplinary nature of the study leads to the argument that this is a new problem, which requires new theories which will be induced from the respondents. This falls into the observe and bridge categories in the OBC model which requires that analyses involve the identification of gaps in existing literature and cyclical questioning of existing assumptions and theories (Lindgreen et al., 2021) with the intention of interpreting the qualitative analysis in new ways (Bansal, Smith & Vaara, 2018). The gap in literature is argued to be a focus on the forced global adoption of previous rejected distance learning methods by established MBA students as argued in the literature review.

The data gathered will be assessed from the respondent's experiences using thematic analysis. This is motivated by the nature of thematic analysis which calls for pattern recognition after analysis of raw data followed by consolidation of trends into notions through in depth interpretation and exploration (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Lawless & Chen (2019) can further motivate this position as they state that thematic analysis is widely recognised as a method of qualitative, inductive analysis.

Practically, the analysis of the data this will involve sorting and consolidation of all responses to each question. The dangers of subjectiveness and imposing questions or interpretations of responses is acknowledged. This could involve interpretation of responses in a convenient way. To address this Braun & Clarke's (2021) assessment into ensuring quality in thematic analysis was utilised. Braun & Clarke (2021) presented ten common problems associate with thematic analysis. These problems ranged from citing without reading, coding and theme confusion, lack of critical analysis of respondents, an over emphasis on passive description of accounts of respondents without engaging with the findings with the largest being the incorrect assumption that thematic analysis is a single approach. These problems were considered in the research process while assessing the data. The proposed publication evaluation tool, developed by Braun & Clarke (2021) was used to ensure the quality of the thematic analysis.

#### **4.10 Quality Controls**

The recommendations of Roberts (2020, p. 3200) state that novice researchers should “pilot and practice” their research process then “review, reflect and refine”

their attitudes. After reflection on the experience of conducting the first two interviews, some changes were made to the manner in which questions were asked. This involved reassuring the respondent of their right to uninfluenced freedom of expression while also giving context to upcoming questions so that expression of challenging elements, question 6 and its subsections, and beneficial elements, question 7 and its sub sections, be separated.

Instances where respondents were prompted beyond the questions in the research instrument were indicated in data transcription. An example could be where a respondent indicated that they had already answered the question and were prompted that they could chose to repeat themselves or they could choose to state that they feel they have already answered.

Otter.ai was used to transcribe the interviews. The researcher then personally listened to the audio recordings twice to correct mistakes and to enable deep engagement with the responses. The number of interviews per day was limited to ensure that fatigue did not affect quality.

#### **4.11 Limitations**

As mentioned in literature survey, the crisis has effected over 1.5 billion learners globally (Oliveira et al., 2021). It goes without saying that this study will not be able to reach a sample that represents the global learner population. In addition, it is understood that interpretive analysis involves subjective judgement calls of respondent's expressions. The concerns of transnational students, raised by Stewart (2019) were not investigated as all respondents resided within South Africa. This also meant that concerns about time zones, raised by Conrad et al. (2022) were not evaluated. Lastly, Soliman et al. (2022) finding of increased enrolment in Egypt was discovered at a later stage in the research, therefore enrolment figures in relation to non-pandemic years and motivation for enrolment was not considered.

#### **4.12 Section Outline**

This section presented the research design. Having identified a gap in literature, namely a lack of analysis into the experiences of executive MBA students and the

unprecedented nature of the crisis leading to forced adoption, this research seeks to examine the experiences of executive MBA students who learned from home in an exploratory, qualitative and inductive manner. The research questions will involve exploring both challenging and beneficial experiences during emergency remote education as well as seeking to establish explicit calls for retention of practices used during the response to the pandemic.

## **Chapter 5 – Research Findings**

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of the interview process which sought to draw out qualitative answers to the research questions identified in Chapter 3. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured method and participants were encouraged to express themselves freely. Practically, this involved encouragement for the participants speak their minds, reassurance that they must not be influenced by interviewee and that there are no correct answers. This extended to a decision being made to ask permission to end the interview to ensure full freedom of expression. The exploratory nature of the analysis led to inductive analysis and creation of codes categories and themes that answered the research questions. This chapter begins by describing the sample, presenting the codes, categories and themes identified and then discussing the findings.

### **5.1 Description of the Sample**

The sample consisted of 22 respondents all of whom registered to begin their executive MBA studies in 2020 or 2021. 19 of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 effected executive MBA was their first experience of emergency remote education. Two of the remaining three learners had been registered for studies in 2020, the year prior to the start of their executive MBA, and the third participant's response was inaudible. 15 of the respondents indicated that they registered knowing that they would probably have remote sessions in the light of the COVID pandemic. The remaining 7 stated that they were not sure what would happen due to different stages of lockdown around the end of 2020 and the start of 2021 and also indicated that they did not give much thought to the delivery method. Importantly, for the sake of the focus of the study, all 22 respondents indicated that they attended online classes while at home. Therefore, it is argued that the participants in this sample represent executive MBA students who learned from home and experienced emergency remote education.

This categorisation of respondents was created by examining the first five questions of the research instrument. A summary of responses is presented in Exhibit 1 in the appendices. As discussed in the research design, no willing participants were excluded and demographic information (such as age, race, ethnicity, religion etc)

were not captured. However, the gender of the respondents was captured by the interviewee. Respondent numbers were created with the prefix “R”, a sequential number indicating the order in which they were interviewed, a single character representing the respondents gender followed by the year in which the respondent first registered for their executive MBA. For example, respondent R16F21 represents the 16<sup>th</sup> interviewee was female and first registered in 2021 whereas respondent R17M20 as the 17<sup>th</sup> interviewee, male and was first registered for their executive MBA in 2020. After completing the initial findings of the write up chapter, a search for participant numbers was conducted within the findings chapter. This revealed that contributions from all 22 respondents were included in the findings.

## **5.2 Analysis Process: Transcription, Codes, Categories & Themes**

As stated in the research design chapter the conduction of the interviews and the transcription was not delegated. This was done to enable deeper engagement with the participants and the data. After completing all 22 interviews, the recordings were imported into Otter.ai for transcription. Each interview was then listened to and compared to the automatic transcription after which any errors were corrected. After printing and reviewing the transcripts, it was found that numerous punctuation errors were present, such as illogical commas and full stops, which materially affected one’s ability to read the transcription.

Therefore, a second round of quality assurance was conducted which involved listening to all 22 interviews again in order to correct punctation errors and to further engage with the data. During this further engagement with the data initial rough coding was conducted in Microsoft Excel. This initial analysis identified 27 codes (shown in Exhibit 2 in the appendices), some of which were later deemed not mutually exclusive, split up and identified as meta-codes instead of codes. This initial rough coding appeared to show that saturation was reached by participant 5 with only 2 new themes emerging thereafter.

The volume of data and guidance from faculty led to a decision to conduct a new analysis and coding exercise in Atlas.ti. 22 separate documents, one per respondent, were created and inserted into Atlas.ti. The coding process then begun from scratch

while treating the initial codes, shown in Exhibit 2 in the appendices, as a checklist to ensure that no codes were overlooked. In the new analysis 44 codes, shown in Table 2, were identified and grouped into categories which closely related to the headings within section 5.3 which presents the findings. The process of moving from raw codes to code groups and themes is explained in the findings of each section. As can be seen in Table 2, saturation was reached by the 7<sup>th</sup> interview with only 5 new themes emerging thereafter.

Table 2 : Atlas.ti Code Book

Code/Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
Retention	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	
Flexibility	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Conflict	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x	x		x		
PresentInPerson	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
InteractiveElementsInPerson	x	x	x		x		x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x		
TimesChangeBeFlexible	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x		x	
EngagementHigherInPerson	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		
AvoidTravel	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
OnlinePresentEasier	x	x				x	x	x									x	x				x	
ExamPrep	x		x	x	x		x				x		x	x				x		x			
ExamAtHome	x		x	x		x				x		x	x	x	x	x							
FamilyTime	x		x							x	x					x				x	x		
AdminPresenceNeeded	x			x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x		x	
HomeCompartments	x			x					x	x			x	x	x			x		x			
IntentionalExclusion	x				x		x	x												x		x	
Q8-Online	x					x		x														x	
BondsInPerson	x						x						x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		
PhysicalInfrastructure		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x			x	x	x	x	x	
Q8-OnCampus		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
HidingCameraOff		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
OneWayTeaching-KeepOnline		x		x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					
MoreVerbalBehindScreen		x																					
LearningFromPeers			x	x	x		x			x	x					x		x	x	x	x		
Networking			x	x	x						x	x	x			x			x	x			
GroupWork			x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
IntrovertAnxiety			x			x					x		x			x						x	
NonTechnicalDisruption				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x		
Attention&Distraction				x	x	x	x		x	x					x		x				x		
ZoomLimitations				x	x		x	x					x		x	x	x						
Integrity				x																			
OnlineRandomness				x																			
PauseConflict				x																			
Resilience					x					x					x	x							
DeEscalateConflict					x										x								
Complacency					x																		
SeparateConflict						x																x	
SpeakConflict							x		x		x												
QQ							x				x	x	x	x		x						x	
Orientation							x					x					x		x				
5to1											x	x	x										
ZoomSplitAttention																x			x		x		
ZoomFunnies																x							
UnitedInAdversity																x		x					
Safety																					x		



## **5.3 Findings**

Having examined the raw data in relation to the research instrument and the research questions, the responses were placed into categories relating to each research question. This section presents the findings in relation to each research question. It begins with section 5.3.1 which deals with challenging experiences of executive MBA students during emergency remote education and while learning from home.

### **5.3.1 Findings for Research Question 1 – Challenges**

This section discusses the findings relating to the expressed challenges of emergency remote education. These findings were induced primarily from question 6, its subsections, and questions 8 and 11 of the research instrument. Exhibit 3 in the appendices presents the original quotations and the phrases that were extracted for use in this section.

#### **5.3.1.1 Universal Challenges**

This section discusses what were identified as the “universal findings” or sentiments. Practically this involved any codes that were identified in more than 80% (18 out of 22) of participants and indicated challenging experiences.

##### **5.3.1.1.1 Physical Infrastructure**

Physical infrastructure limitations caused by load shedding and internet connection strength were identified as problematic. Outright lack of availability caused an inability to participate, while anxiety was caused by being aware to “*charge your laptop, charge your phone and try to buy data*” (R14F21). While most students knew how to be prepared, there were instances where students “*missed out*” (R22M21) and experienced further anxiety due to “*very poor cell phone signal coverage*” in their area (R18M21). Abnormal disruptions, such as out of schedule power cuts where people were “*out of electricity for three days and they ran out of battery*” (R20F21) were problematic as they created questions of accountability with some students hiding “*behind the veil of technology*” and blaming it for lack of performance (R18M21) and, in one extreme case, where someone was “*clearly caught out lying*” (R18M21) about having loadshedding.

### 5.3.1.1.2 Non-technical disruptions

Non-technical disruptions caused by being in the home environment were also universally identified as problematic. These were mainly caused by “*family*” (R7M21), “*pets*” (R12M21) “*and neighbours deciding to mow the lawn*” (R14F21) leading students to become “*easily distracted by other people*” (R7M21). There were also incidents caused by visitors “*at the gate*” (R6M21) or something “*needs to be done*” (R6M21). There were also a minority of respondents who identified children as distracting an incident where they wanted attention as taking “*away from my learning experience*” (R21M21). In one case this was seen as the “*biggest challenge*” as the respondent was a “*mom to a toddler*” (R9F21) and the respondent felt she could not “*just brush her away*” (R9F21) and felt very self-conscious with the microphone and web camera and could focus by physically removing herself. Lastly, respondent R10M21 identified lecturer preparedness as a non-technical inhibitor leaving students “*completely bewildered*” due to their not being well versed “*in the new online way of teaching*”. This resulted in their not “*always watching some of the screens.*”

### 5.3.1.1.3 Question 8 and elements missing from online interactions

This section discusses the responses to question 8 of the research instrument. This resulted in an overwhelming preference for in person interactions and also presents those elements that were identified as missing from the emergency remote education experiences.

Question 8 of the research instrument asked respondents to choose between either emergency remote education or on campus, 18 out of 22 respondents indicated they would prefer on campus interactions. Reasons for this preference included desire for “*soft skill development, the engagement, the immersion*” (R17M20) that comes with an in-person MBA experience where “*a lot of learning comes from observation as well or you know, visual mentorship*” (R16F21). This could be described as an “*immersive experience*” where one “*actively*” seeks out “*that sort of social learning engagement*” (R18M21) that results in people “*feeling the energy around*” (R21M21). Participant R7M21 provided, a powerful analogy to describe the immersion of in person interactions:

*"I can almost give it a comparison to reading a physical book or listening to an audio book. It's easier to zone out in an audio book and miss five sentences versus reading an actual book I have to pay attention if I stop reading the lines while it's not going to read itself."*

The minority of respondents who indicated a preference for online cited "convenience", avoiding "social anxiety" (R22M21), "time management" and "safety" (R6M21) and citing the fact that "times have changed, we need to try and move digital" (R8F21).

Although not in direct response to question 8, it was induced that onsite experiences were preferred due to the almost unanimous indication that engagements were higher in person as members of the class could "sort of bounce ideas off" each other as opposed to online where they would operate in a "total silo" (R1F21). This involved "insights and feeding off, sort of, you know, body language" (R7M21) from classmates and lecturers, with the lack of ability to "see the reaction of your classmates" (R11M21) as a major challenge. Lack of this interaction resulted in motivational issues, with it becoming "easier to sort of lose focus" (R7M21) and "getting bored easily" (R10M21). In person class was identified as having "more stimulation", being "more engaging", being more "thought provoking" (R10M21) and enabling the building of "rapport" and "cohesion" (R17M20). This rapport and cohesion could come in the form of "meeting people, interacting, forming relationships" (R13M21).

In addition to concerns about not being able to read people, concern was expressed about people being misunderstood in chat messages where the respondent "did not feel like people were reading that properly" (R18M21). Respondent R14F21 indicated that inability to read "people's temperaments and how they really are and how you can connect with them" made her "a lot more reserved" than usual because she was "just sceptical of not really understanding people on the other side of the screen" (R14F21).

An explicit example of the preference for in person interactions was found in conducting presentations. While it was acknowledged that "different types of skills

sets” were needed in “*presenting online versus presenting in person*” and it was “*much easier to present online*” (R18M21), there was acknowledgement for the “*mental friction of being on the spot with all the people physically*” and that it would be a problem if a person was unable to “*really stand up on a podium in front of a whole crowd and deliver a meaningful message*” (R18M21). One participant also indicated a desire for “*more exposure standing in front of the classroom*” (R1F21) with another stating that avoiding presentations would amount to “*doing yourself and obviously everyone else an injustice*” because the “*difficult situations*” that cause us “*to actually grow and be comfortable*” (R17M2). Other benefits included “*getting reaction from the audience that they are with you*” (R15M21), an ability to “*make a joke*” (R16F21).

### **5.3.1.2 Main challenges and limitations**

In addition to physical infrastructure and non-technical disruptions, discussed in section 5.3.1.1 and presented as universal challenges, four additional challenges were induced from the emergency remote education experience namely: platform limitations, attention limitations, lack of class member participation and having to compartmentalise the home environment. These are presented in this section.

#### **5.3.1.2.1 Platform Limitations**

The first limitation induced was the nature or limitations of platform (Zoom) used to conduct emergency remote education. Respondent R17M20 identified a challenge in “*becoming accustomed to this new medium of learning*”. While the platform itself took some time to adjust to there were other elements such as “*etiquette*” (R16F21) on the platform which required adjustment as there were situations where “*everyone’s just talking on top of each other*” (R17M20). It was also difficult to clarify misunderstandings with peers as asking what was going on would involve holding up “*the entire session with an inquiry*” (R17M20).

Respondent R4F21 felt having the “*chat functionality open to all classmates*” resulted in one having to “*split your attention*” between the chat or paying attention to what was being said. Respondent R15M21 echoed this sentiment stating that “*juggling*” the chat and the lecturer was “*just weird*” and stated that there were limitations also

on the lecturer's side, with only some *"that could manoeuvre both lecturing and then spotting what is said in the chats."* In contrast, respondent R5F21 stated that the chat functionality would compensate for this inability to seek clarity as described it as *"far less disruptive than putting up your hand in class"* resulting in interaction *"without disrupting the flow"* of the lecture (R5F21).

#### **5.3.1.2.2 Attention Deficit**

The second limitation involved respondents' inability to pay attention during emergency remote education and experiencing distractions in the home environment. This finding is closely related to the non-technical disruptions identified as a universal challenge in previous discussions but are more focused on the area of attention. In the words of respondent R4F21, her *"own attention"* was a challenge which would often result in it being easier to *"zone out and miss a couple of things"* (R7M21) as *"you could pay attention for the first 15 or 20 minutes but then it becomes a struggle to pay attention"* (R15M21). Respondent R10M21 suggested that *"the lack of physical interaction often results in getting bored easily, distracted rather."* The *"concentration element"* (R17M20) was not helped by being *"more susceptible to distractions because you're a lot less worried about what your perception might be, especially when your cameras are off"* (R17M20).

#### **5.3.1.2.3 Lack of camera usage**

In the words of respondent R20F21, *"there's something that I think is lost in the virtual environment because a lot of people prefer to switch their cameras off."* This ability to *"just switch off your camera and mute your mic"* (R21M21) has also been induced as limitation for interactions with the class as a whole. It led to difficulty in being able to *"really gauge people and how they feel about certain topics"* (R6M21) and an inability to *"read the room and body language"* (R12M21) making it *"hard to communicate in a way"* (R12M21) with a lack of *"expression"* (R8F21). Having cameras switched off was described as *"some sort of barrier between myself and other class members"* (R21M21).

This could possibly be because it would become *"easier just to escape as it were and not be involved"* (R7M21) as if the people *"were there but not there"* (R8F21).

Respondents R19M21 identified a *“loss of quality of information dissemination”* due to *“lower class participation”* as some class members would *“switch off the cameras”* and *“never participate leading to a loss in the opportunity to learn”* (R19M21). Respondent R5F21 stated that they *“may end up not being as prepared online as you would have been in the physical class”* seem to be admission of guilt and confirmation of the concerns raised by respondent R19M21.

Respondents R11M21, R12M21 and R13M21 suggested that the lack of participation of most of the class having their cameras off lead to what they were induced as the 5to1 problem where the lecturer *“tends to start concentrating on the guy that talks the most”* (R11M21) leading to a situation where *“at the end of it becomes five students and one lecturer dominating where no one else is taking”* (R11M21) leading to a more *“one sided passive thing”* (R13M21) with *“one or two people having a lot to say or asking a lot of questions”* (R13M21). In some instances, these students were *“not letting the lecturer actually lecture on what we were supposed to be learning and almost like diverting onto other topics”* (R12M21).

#### **5.3.1.2.4 Compartmentalising the home**

The fourth challenge of the online emergency remote education involved the need to compartmentalise parts of the learner’s home into a dedicated learning space. Respondent R14F21 indicated that going to campus physically results in *“your mind”* getting a *“trigger that you’re in a different environment”* (R14F21) as if they were in *“a different zone”* with a different *“ambiance of being in a school environment”* (R14F21), the lack of change resulted in becoming *“just zoned out mentally”* (R14F21). This lack of a trigger led to respondents indicating that they required their own *“dedicated space to walk in and pretend like you’re in class”* (R4F21). R1F21 indicated it was *“nice to have different things broke up into different places”* which was in the form of a *“designated workspace”* where one could *“close the door and focus”* while not being *“distracted by external things”* (R4F21).

This designated workspace could be described as a *“proper home office setup”* with a *“great quality screen and keyboard and mouse and comfortable chair”* (R18M21). The rapid nature of emergency remote education meant that these home

compartments were often not set up, resulting in respondents having to make “*certain purchases*” for a “*comfortable learning space*” (R13M21). The need for a comfortable environment, separate from distractions with the correct “*chair, desk and screen and lighting*” (R10M21) was closely related to “*screen fatigue*” (R10M21) and the “*level of exhaustion from just being on your screen all day*” (R20F21) as lecturers would last for “*three plus hours*” (R15M21) after “*sitting the whole day from work*” leading to one “*not absorbing what’s being taught*” (R15M21).

### **5.3.1.3 Other Missing Elements**

This section presents some of other missing elements from the emergency remote education experience which were not derived from question 8. This was achieved by examining the codes which were related to missing elements resulting in challenges in learning from home, but not grouped under the universal challenges and included orientation, networking and learning from peers.

#### **5.3.1.3.1 Induction and orientation was lacking**

There was a call for “*induction*” (R19M21) or “*orientations*” (R17M20), which are “*definitely important*” (R17M20) to be in person as it “*would have been really beneficial to have been in person and not online to get to know your fellow students*” (R7M21). Respondent R12M21 stated that the class was “*kind of robbed of those advantages*” of being able to “*interact and communicate with people face to face, get to know each other better and so forth*” (R12M21) with respondent R3F21 stating that “*introductory elements must always be physical*” (R3F21) as there is great value in the “*first interactions*” (R3F21).

#### **5.3.1.3.2 Networking and social opportunities lost**

Respondents cited enhanced “*communication*” and “*networking opportunities with other class members*” (R19M21) as better in the physical environment. It was argued that online interactions inhibit “*forming relationships*” (R13M21) which is “*part of what you pay for*” (R13M21) in an MBA. This includes “*the interactive aspect of meeting people from different industries and peers within your industry and peers within your circle*” (R13M21) which is part of the “*social aspect*” (R13M21) which is “*missing from it when it’s purely remote*” (R13M21). While the comments supported networking

through physical interactions, one respondent, R4F21 presented a unique view that pairing people randomly online in a zoom breakout room was “nice” as one was not “stuck talking to the people that you tend to sit with.” This suggests a sense of “randomness” that could enhance networking available in the online environment.

#### **5.3.1.3.3 Lack of learning from peers and observation**

Respondents saw emergency remote education as a barrier that prevented them from learning from each other. Reasons included a perspective that a “lot of learning comes from observation as well as, you know, visual mentorship” (R16F21) which is difficult to create online as there was no “peer-to-peer learning” (R16F21). Respondent R21M21 stated that the “whole point of being in an MBA program is that we are learning from each other” and that this was done much more effectively in person as people “switch off camera’s” whereas in person “it’s a lot harder to hide” (R21M21), implying a level of commitment in being physically present. Respondent R20F21 identified the informal breaks as a critical learning space stating:

*“Whether it’s tea break or lunch break when we are on site during tea breaks you chat to your classmates, you know, they are there next to you there’s nothing else you can run and quickly, you know pour yourself a cup of tea, you know, like you will get home where everybody switches off themselves off in, you know, you go into something in the house. So when you are in the classroom, you have to chat to each other during tea times, you sit together, you know, it break time at lunchtime and so the conversations continue to flow sometimes from the class, to during break time, or else you bond better with your classmates, you know, your interpersonal relationships with your colleagues, your peers, you know, your classmates, I think we’re enhanced that that bonding building your networks, I found it much easier in the classroom situation than online literally the moment the lecture finishes everybody is either switching off their cameras.”*

Respondent R3F21 echoed these sentiments stating that it was:

*“Easier to even have a follow up during tea break on maybe something, some concepts that you didn’t grasp quite well, or even chat over coffee with a classmate on that concept and then you unpack it, the learning actually occurs in*



*that space. So, you know, learning, your book of learning is more, is bigger, when you're in person than online"*

Both sentiments imply an importance in an *"ability to learn from peers"* rather than only *"learning from faculty"* (R3F21). This is difficult to replicate online as in the *"online environment there's no such thing as an informal chat"* (R11M21) as *"you can't easily chat to a buddy if you've missed a concept, or you misheard something"* (R10M21) resulting in there being *"gaps in your knowledge"* (R10M21).

### 5.3.1.4 Coding architecture and section summary

Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of how the challenging issues were determined. The raw codes such as "NonTechnicalDisruptions", "PhysicalInfrastructure" and "Orientation" are represented by the rectangles. These were themed into the subsections, represented by circles, of "Challenges", "Q8 & Missing Elements", "Other challenges" and "Missing Elements" which form the subsections of this section. The former two sub sections were categorised under Universal Views, as there was more than 80% support for these notions. All these findings represented challenging experiences of executive MBA students as a result of emergency remote education and learning from home.

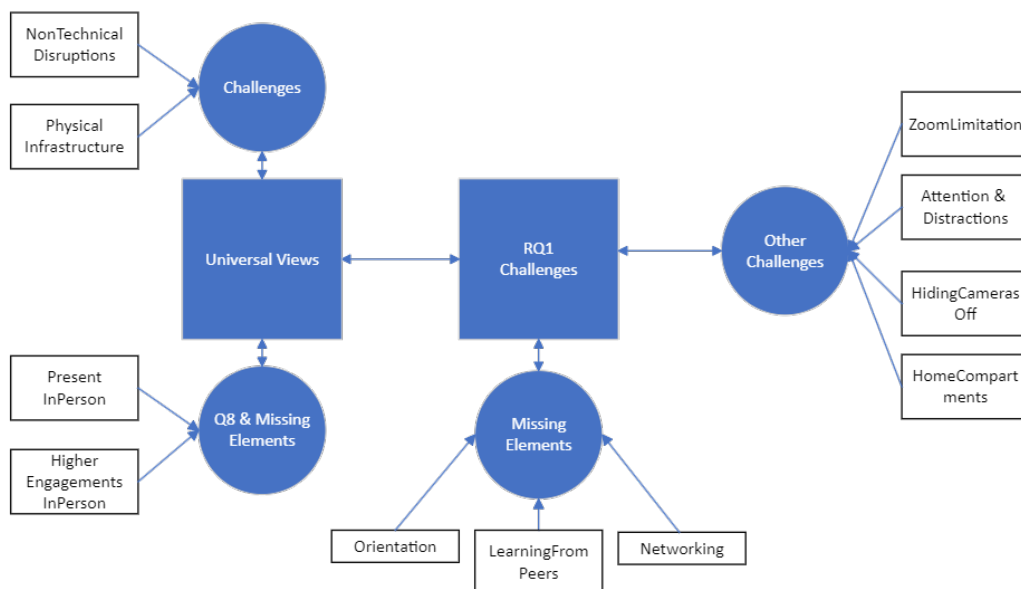


Figure 1: Research Question 1 Coding Architecture

In summary, in this section universal challenges are presented. These include physical infrastructure failures, such as connectivity and load shedding, and the non-technical disruptions in the home environment which are related to domestic

distractions. A preference for in person interactions was also identified. The section further identifies limitations of the Zoom platform and an inability to pay attention for long periods of time due to distractions as limiting. These limitations are usually corrected by forming a separate workspace within one's home, or a separate compartment which is more conducive to distance learning. The ability of classmates to hide behind cameras being turned off was raised again, but expanded beyond limiting group interactions onto the class as a whole. In addition, the importance of in person orientation, networking and learning from peers was presented. Lastly, a lack of the effectiveness of induction, orientation, networking and inhibited interactions with peers was presented as elements missing from the emergency remote education experience.

### **5.3.2 Findings for Research Question 2 – Benefits**

This section discusses the findings relating to the expressed benefits of emergency remote education. These findings were induced primarily from question 7 of the research instrument, and its sub sections. Exhibit 4 in the appendices presents the original quotations and the phrases that were extracted for use in this section.

#### **5.3.2.1 Universal Benefits**

This section discusses what were identified as the “universal findings” or sentiments. Practically this involved any codes that were identified in more than 80% (18 out of 22) or participants and indicated beneficial experiences.

##### **5.3.2.1.1 Avoiding Traffic**

Avoiding travel to and from the physical campus was seen as a “*huge saver*” (R10M21) enabling people to “*prepare for lectures better*” (R15M21) with a “*more efficient and structured*” (R17M20) approach to studies. Efficiency was emphasised by participant R4F21 who saved up to “*two and half hours*” avoiding traffic and by R20F21 who enjoyed not being concerned with the “*safety issue in Joburg.*”

The efficiency was not only achieved by avoiding travel but also by not having to wake up early and get “*prepared physically to look appropriate for business level interactions*” (R18M21). Lastly, participant R15M21 raised a unique point about

further exam anxiety being reduced with exams being at home and there being no possibility of obstructions between home and a physical exam venue.

#### **5.3.2.1.2 Flexibility**

In addition to avoiding travel, the participants identified flexibility and the freedom to “do other things” (R21M21) and the ability to “complete other tasks” (R19M21) during “some calls that are brain dead” (R21M21). This created an “efficiency element” where people did not need to “get together on campus every single time” (R17M20) for group work and could connect “anywhere in South Africa or the world for that matter” (R7M21). In addition to locational flexibility, time flexibility was also identified as beneficial as the “ability to be able to connect at any hour of the day” (R3F21) enabled people to meet “for like 10 or 15 minutes to quickly discuss something” (R13M21) in the comfort of their “own home” and their “own computer” knowing “everything is convenient” (R7M21).

#### **5.3.2.2 Main benefits**

In addition to the universal benefits described in section 5.3.2.1 above, three additional benefits of emergency remote education were induced namely: increased family time, advantageous one-way teaching and a unique view of the emergency creating an additional sense of unity in adversity.

##### **5.3.2.2.1 Family Time**

In terms of increased family times, respondent R11M21 highlighted that he was told that an MBA can be classified as a “divorce degree”. The flexibility of being able to learn from home enabled him to “have a cup of tea” with his wife and spend time “kicking the ball” with his “five-year-old” which made a “massive difference” to his life. Respondent R3F21 concurred stating that:

*“The ability to still be able to go and say goodnight to my children, before they went to bed. I think during those tea breaks one could just quickly run up and say goodnight, it meant a lot to me... I could tuck them in bed during our tea breaks online. I could tuck the kids in bed and still be that mom.”*

Respondent R10M21 echoed these sentiments stating that “home relationships” were helped massively as they were not “completely away from the time”, they left

the office until their return. In essence it was beneficial as it gave *“the family a sense that you are in the home, they can reach you”* (R20F21).

#### **5.3.2.2 Beneficial one-way interactions**

Having certain elements, such as the non-interactive one-way teaching elements in online format was also induced as a benefit of emergency remote education. While in person interactions were almost universally identified as crucial to the learning process with interactions being richer in person some participants identified the use of online session for the less interactive elements as beneficial.

These fewer interactive elements were described as *“non-subject matter”* (R16F21) that were *“sort of not core lectures”* (R7M21), that involved *“one way feed of information”* (R2M21), that was *“kind of a stock standard, very theoretical presentation driven”* (R17M20), including *“pre-work”* (R14F21), *“like workshops and administrative things”* (R7M21) and *“technical stuff”* (R4F21) which could remain in an online format. Respondent R11M21 stated:

*“The courses like the ones that we’re doing now like, you know, the writing skills and the qualitative research we did yesterday. I think when there’s when there’s 90% of talking from a lecturer, you know, on methodology with where things are when things are either black or white, it should remain online”*

The shortened length of these interactions where one could *“just connect and listen, interact a bit or not”* (R18M21) also meant less was lost in the online environment.

#### **5.3.2.3 Unity in adversity**

Lastly, a unique point was raised by two participants. Respondent R16F21 identified the start of the MBA process which involved getting to know a whole bunch of strangers as *“difficult enough let alone doing that online”* (R16F21) but identified the emergency as a *“common trauma, not trauma, but... a common goal or experience”* (R16F21) which resulted in people becoming *“actually united”* (R16F21) in the adversity of the pandemic as everyone was *“kind of forced to be online quite quickly and had to be organised”* (R18M21).

### 5.3.2.3 Coding architecture and section summary

Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of how the beneficial experiences were determined. The raw codes such as “flexibility”, “avoidTraffic” are represented by the rectangles. These were themed into the subsections, represented by circles, of “Universal benefits” and “other benefits” which form the subsections of this section. The former sub section, “benefits” comprised elements that fell under the universal views, as there was more than 80% support for these notions. All these findings represented beneficial experiences of executive MBA students as a result of emergency remote education.

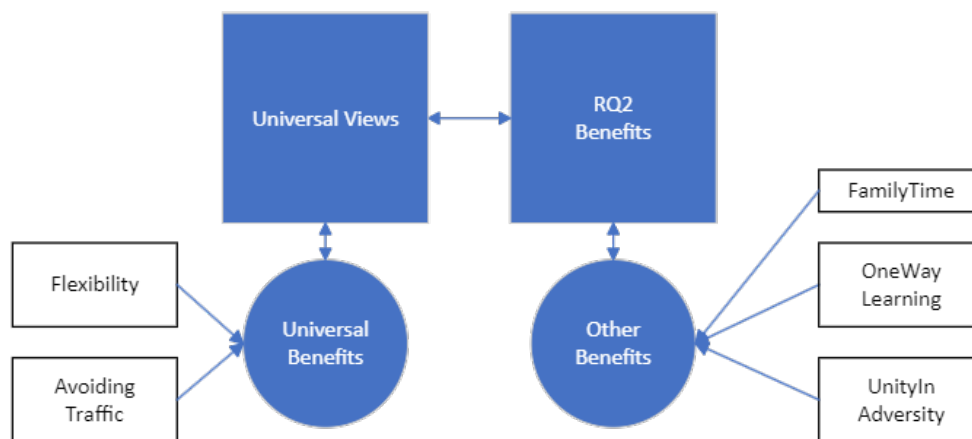


Figure 2: Research Question 2 Coding Architecture

In summary, in this section the universal benefits were presented. This included flexibility and an ability to avoid traffic which resulted in better use of time and an ability to connect to the class regardless of circumstance or location. The section further identifies an ability to have small family interactions as helpful. In addition, the more non-interactive, one-way teaching elements of the degree were identified as beneficial in the online format. Lastly, a minority view argued the difficult nature of the emergency remote education created a sense of unity in adversity for the class as a whole.

### 5.3.3 Findings for Research Question 3 – Retention

While previous sections presented the induced findings relating to the challenges and benefits of emergency remote education, this section discusses the findings relating to elements or items that respondents identified that should be retained from the emergency remote education experience. These findings were mostly induced from question 14 of the research instrument however calls for retention from other

areas of the research instrument, notably questions 9, 10, 12 and 13 were also included in this induction. Exhibit 5 in the appendices presents the original quotations and the phrases that were extracted for use in this section.

### **5.3.3.1 Thoughts on Exams**

Respondents indicated that they found having the recordings of lectures available on demand enhanced their exam preparation experience by creating “*a lot of rigour to... study groups*” (R1F21) enabling learners to “*go back to those recordings pause wherever*” and go at their “*own pace*” (R3F21). They were considered “*a valuable resource to go back to*” (R20F21). In addition to the recordings, the ability to “*take snap shots and things like that*” (R4F21) was helpful as the “*screenshots of the notes*” were taken “*while the lecture is happening*” rather than there being a delay and having to “*wait for the slides after the lecture*” (R11M21).

In addition to having recordings and being able to take screenshots of lectures enhancing exam preparation, respondents indicated that the ability to interact with peers during “*tea breaks*” enabled “*shared learning*” where one was not “*learning in a silo*” (R1F21). The inability to connect with one’s peers led to an inability to form “*relationships as organically as you would if you’re in the classroom setting*” resulting in a “*lonely experience*” during exam time (R20F21). Online exams did however allow students to create their own “*documents prior to the exam*” (R4F21) resulting in a “*more structured approach*” because templates had been set up “*to handle certain questions*” (R4F21) rather than having to write everything out by hand.

In terms of exams being hosted remotely, only one respondent raised concern about the integrity of the exam stating that “*people can cheat and all sorts of things*” (R4F21). Two other respondents raised concerns about their feeling of insecurity about “*exam submissions... not received on time or not received at all*” (R12M21) and the “*reaching people from an administration point of view*” (R10M21) resulting in a “*disjointed*” experience with the invigilator having “*no clue about the exam*” (R10M21).

In contrast, other respondents appreciated the ability to “*make your own classroom in your own space*” (R13M21) enabling them to have all their “*notes available... all the time*” (R13M21). There was a call by a number of respondents for exams to remain online. Respondent R15M21 stated that reduced “*anxiety*” resulting from not having to “*wake up on time, drive to campus and find a place*” with “*travel time*” making a big difference.

### **5.3.3.2 Classroom and social aspects**

The previous section described calls for retention of online exams. This section deals with calls for retention relating to in classroom and social aspects of the executive MBA experiences while learning from home.

#### **5.3.3.2.1 Keep interactive course elements in person**

While it was identified, in section 5.3.2.2.2 as beneficial to have certain elements that are “*non-subject*” matter (R16F21), “*sort of not core lectures*” (R7M21) and “*technical stuff*” (R4F21) in an online form, there was also an explicit call to retain some of the more “*interactive*” (R2M21) subject sessions in person. These areas are those that “*require sort of extensive debate or discussion*” (R17M20) or are “*discussable*” (R11M21) where the class is required to “*converge our thinking where we could come up with different ideas and cover the actual core lectures*” (R7M21) should be conducted in person.

#### **5.3.3.2.2 Resilience**

The slightly abstract concept of resilience was mentioned by a minority of respondents. The experience of emergency remote education leading to a lesson that one can “*make it work regardless*” and “*get the job done regardless*” and one can navigate a “*technical or logistical or acts of God*” by working around it (R5F21). This served as proof that “*we are highly adaptable beings, irrespective of age*” (R10M21). Critically, some people were “*forced to become an online person*” (R15M21) resulting in having to “*quickly get comfortable with being online, be comfortable with like being savvy with your laptop and all these other fancy programs*” (R15M21). This experience was identified as providing “*humility*” (R5F21) and providing the “*educational fraternity with additional scope to evolve to deliver, to*

*participate, and altogether have a higher level of interaction” (R5F21). This can be related to the beneficial increased awareness about mental health and to the feelings of unity in adversity described in section 5.3.2.2.3.*

### **5.3.3.3 A call for recognition of changing times**

The point in section 5.3.3.2.2 above about resilience and the educational fraternity having additional scope leads poetically into the last point. It was induced that there was a sense that the respondents were calling for academia to recognise that times have changed, and that academia should change with trends. Respondent R8F21 set the tone stating:

*“Maybe if we saying we moving into the we are in the VUCA, the VUCA world things have changed. Holding on to traditional ways of doing things it becomes almost impossible because the times have changed. You want to take us back or you want to do things the way you have been doing. So, let's allow the change and at the same time there are things to still retain in terms of engagement having people interaction connection when we are face to face. So, I think it's important to balance the two.”*

VUCA refers to Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous environment of the modern age where *“holding on to traditional ways of doing things”* becomes *“almost impossible”* (R8F21). Respondent R1F21 echoed this statement referring to a need for 100% attendance as *“punitive and ridiculous”* arguing that the days of *“pick one country every day is ridiculous”* as *“people travel.”* The respondent went further to state that *“I hate to think if I ever want to pursue an MBA, I have to be in every class”* (R1F21). Respondent R22M21 concurred suggesting an element of hypocrisy stating:

*“The weird part is we are always, you know, most of the time, at school, taught about the importance of agility. However, the same people that are teaching us about the importance of agility and where we see the future schools to look like [are] the ones that are quite static in their thinking.”*

While there was a call for flexibly and allowing people to *“choose how they want to be educated”* (R6M21), there was also a call for control with suggestions of being a requirement to have a *“reasonable excuse why you can't be on campus”* (R15M21)



with an example being “*proof that you are travelling and correct procedures*” (R2M21) should be followed in managing online attendance.

Thoughts on this matter were not limited to attendance with respondent R18M21 suggesting that it would be “*beneficial to have some sort of hybrid approach*” where personal matters would not inhibit someone from catching up if they were unable to participate. Respondent R19M21 went further to suggest that there “*should be a 50% quota to attend physically*” so that the flexibility does not inhibit “*networking, the quality of information, the one-on-one sessions and interactions with your syndicates*” (R19M21).

A minority perspective was expressed by three respondents indicated that they felt online learners were intentionally excluded when classes were conducted using hybrid methods. Hybrid methods involve a portion of the class being in the classroom on campus and a portion of the class being online and participating from home. R1F21 indicated that the dynamic had become “*very punitive and restrictive*” with feelings of “*antagonistic*” behaviour by the university resulting in the punishment of people isolating due to COVID-19.

Respondent R5F21 echoed this sentiment and highlighted inconsistency between the level of engagement from the lecturers with there being a need for a “*lecturer that was aware of the fact that they had the online group and specifically catered for that.*” Lastly, respondent R22M21 felt that lecturers would “*intentionally disregard us online*” and felt that there was a sentiment of “*just like, nope, I won’t be entertaining this online nonsense*”.

#### **5.3.3.4 Coding architecture and section summary**

Figure 3 presents a graphical representation of how the challenging issues were determined. The raw codes such as “retention”, “InteractiveElementsInPerson” are represented by the rectangles. These were themed into the subsections, represented by circles which formed the subsections of this section. These tied into research

question 3 which examined call for retention of practices executed during emergency remote education.

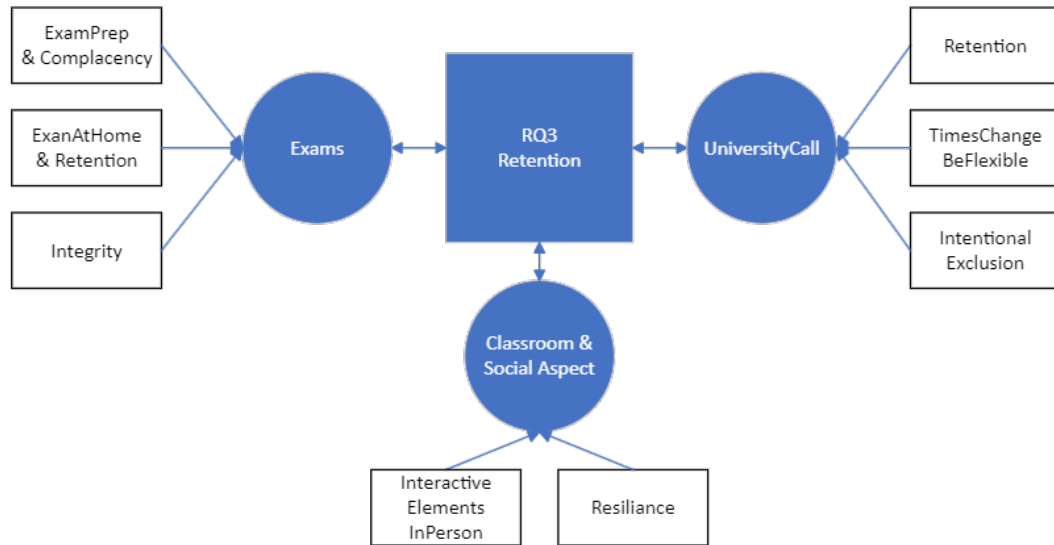


Figure 3: Research Question 3 Coding Architecture

In summary, in this section, the benefits of exam preparation and exam taking under emergency remote education are presented and it was identified as an area that can be retained post COVID-19. In contrast, some more interactive elements should remain in a physical classroom. It was also identified that though COVID-19 was a crisis, the sense of unity in adversity, combined with resilience and the humility involved in adapting to this experience, was in itself a beneficial experience. Lastly, a call for the university to recognise changing times and to retain some of the elements of the emergency remote education was presented.

#### 5.3.4 Additional, less definitive findings

In the previous sections the challenging (section 5.3.1) the beneficial (section 5.3.2) and the calls for retention of learnings (section 5.3.3) were presented. In this section some less definitive and non-universal findings are presented. These are insights involved commentary from between one third and just over half the participants and therefore did not attract as much thought or attention from respondents but provided interesting varying perspectives. The findings of this section are not directly related to any of the research questions. Exhibit 6 in the appendices presents the original quotations and the phrases that were extracted for use in this section.

#### **5.3.4.1 Thoughts on Administration**

The research instrument asked respondents to indicate both challenging and beneficial experiences relating to administration of the executive MBA. These were drawn from questions 6.2 and 7.2 of the research instrument respectively. Most respondents were indifferent to administration and had no comment or position in favour of online or in person methods.

The minority who did comment stated that there was *“no accountability with them with us being online”* (R4F21) which could have been resolved if there was the ability to *“physically go to an admin office of the University”* (R4F21). This affected response times which were not as *“quick as it could have been if we were physical”* (R9F21) in some cases one respondent indicated that he could *“wait 2,3 or 4 days for a reply on something”* (R7M21) when a deadline was looking and another responded indicating that it was necessary to *“send a second or third email”* (R15M21) which was a *“nuisance”* (R1F21) before getting a reaction and often times there was a feeling that the *“message or your mail or communication... just gets lost in translation and gets forgotten about”* (R4F21). From the above, it is induced that where administrators lacked a physical presence, interactions were compromised.

#### **5.3.4.2 Groups & Conflict**

Although there was universal commentary on group work, there were vastly differing views among the participants who commented on this area. Therefore, this section was created. It is split up into different sections representing different views.

##### **5.3.4.2.1 Lack of commitment with camera's off**

Echoing the sentiments of previous sections, where a preference for on campus interactions was identified, respondents commented on their syndicate members being able to hide behind their turned off cameras as an inhibitor to group interaction as participants did not *“engage very well within those circumstances”* (R2M21) and were *“just quiet making it seem obvious that they weren't listening or paying attention”* (R2M21). This resulted in something being *“lost in the virtual environment”* (R20F21).

Respondent R21M21 stated that the cameras being switched off felt as a “*sort of barrier*” effecting communication with R8F21 going as far to say that “*sometimes people were there but not there*” as they would be doing other things while the camera was off leading to difficulty in “*reading the atmosphere*” and inability to “*gauge people and how they are feeling about certain topics*” (R6M21). It would seem that “*having the cameras off*” (R10M21) would lead to people becoming “*less aware or more easily distracted*” than if they had people around them and “*physically being there*” or being “*watched with a presence*” (R10M21). The lack of physical presence could lead to members being “*completely disengaged and unplugged*” only to “*wake up*” later in the conversation taking it back to “*point one*” where progress had already been made (R10M21) leading to group “*frustration*”. The lack of being observed due to having cameras turned off caused “*weaker commitment and contribution*” (R17M21). In one case a respondent, R3F21, felt they had lost progress in both syndicate and class interactions:

*“I actually regressed and went the other way because of the online. I compare myself to my days in PDBA. I was very vocal in class, I had opinions for days and the online sort of gets you to this point of saying if I don't get picked on, I don't need to speak so what the hell, so you sort of get yourself in that zone where you are not speaking much”*

#### **5.3.4.2.2 Administrative and scheduling benefits**

While having cameras off was seen as an inhibitor there were benefits of online interactions similar to the flexibility of class participation expressed in previous sections. While class times are set in curriculum group work and group time often needs to be negotiated and agreed to. “*Scheduling was a lot easier*” (R17M20) as it was “*easier to coordinate*” due to the lack of travelling (R20F21) and also did not require a venue but simply a time to be agreed upon (R21M21). Syndicate rooms at GIBS were described as “*quite daunting late at night*” (R18M21). The views on venues were not universal as some participants felt “*distracted*” without a “*dedicated venue*” due “*family, or work, or whatever*” (R15M21) and that in person group meetings enabled syndicates to “*get down to what you need to a lot faster*” (R7M21).

In terms of the actual group meetings and interactions, numerous respondents highlighted that “*shorter meetings, smaller meetings*” and more purpose driven meetings resulted in “*more focused and a more outcomes-based group work*” (R5F21) with better preparation resulted in a “*higher level of output*” (R5F21). These meetings were “*more frequent at times*” that “*suited everybody*” (R16F21) and could be described as “*agile meetings for like 10 or 15 minutes to quickly discuss something*” (R13M21) rather than having to “*get together on campus every single time to do group work which was exceptionally tedious and drawn-out*” (R17M20).

#### **5.3.4.2.3 Conflict prevented by forming bonds in person**

In the area of conflict there were vastly differing perspectives. The strongest sentiment among those who commented on group conflict was that many conflicts could be prevented by the creation of interpersonal bonds in person. Respondent R14F21 was the most vocal on this point highlighting that it was difficult to read “*temperaments and how they really are and how to connect with them*” resulting in people being a “*lot more reserved and sceptical*” resulting in limitation in forming a “*tribe*” (R14F21). If time had been taken “*to connect physically*” would have helped with “*issues better or just understand each other better*” (R14F21). Part of this in person connection would lead to more connection at a “*human level with much more empathy and caring*” (R14F21). Participant R19M21 echoed these sentiments stating that:

*“Group work requires a level of rapport and there was a lot of misunderstanding because when you're [not] online, you know sometimes you can read people's body language and people seem to behave differently online then personally people tend to be a little bit more friendly. Online you get that tendency of people, some people not being too friendly so it can lead to collapse of syndicates and harm of the quality of work produced by syndicates.”*

Respondent R20F21 presented a view that in person meetings were less purpose driven and allowed informal chats during tea or lunch time whereas online meetings ended abruptly with cameras being switched off limiting one’s ability to build relationships. This cutting off was identified in a different way by respondent R17M20 who stated that online disagreements often lead other members of the syndicate being “*silent on the call*” resulting in the arguing parties not being aware of the stance

of the syndicate. Other respondents indicated that they *“really battled”* because they had never met in person and that *“it caused huge drama and frustration”* (R18M21) because of an inability to build *“a strong connection”* caused concern about abilities to *“depend on each other”* (R18M21). Forming relationships and building trust was identified as *“more challenging as it was a more drawn-out process”* (R13M21) when online. There was a feeling that in person interaction *“actually prevented conflict”* (R19M21) due to *“misunderstandings created through the distance”* (R19M21) which caused members to *“snap at each other”* (R17M20). These misunderstandings which would occur less often if there was *“more time for trust to be built, more time for relationships to be built”* (R1F21).

#### **5.3.4.2.4 Conflict easier to deal with online**

Having identified in person interactions as essential in preventing conflict, the researcher also induced some benefits to dealing with conflict in the online space. Respondent R3F21 found it *“easier to give feedback”* because they felt they had a *“little extra boost in terms of your courage to speak things that you might not see in person”* (R3F21). This was described as providing a *“different perspective to syndicate meetings”* (R11M21) as the *“introverts suddenly become a bit more dominating”* (R11M21) and people becoming a *“lot more verbal if they are behind a screen that what they would be in person”* (R2M21). This gave people the freedom to *“freely and openly speak as opposed to instances”* where people *“shy away from certain conversations”* (R9F21).

In addition, the distance of online allowed for a *“pause period”* where everyone *“took a breather”* and *“could cool down without seeing each other then come back together and regroup”* (R4F21). This meant that it was easier to *“deescalate a situation online”* (R5F21) because where not *“physically present”* people could *“go their own ways”* (R6M21). In some cases, *“everything was sorted out”* (R21M21) by the time the syndicate met again implying that distances methods that were not *“too confrontational”* (R15M21) and resulted in issues being resolved.

#### 5.3.4.2.5 Online conflict can be invasive and bullies are emboldened online

Not all participants supported the notion from the previous section that online methods were better for dealing with group conflict. Concerns were raised that an inability to see body language can lead to a tendency to “run away from dealing with conflict” (R8F21). Respondent R7M21 expressed concern about online group conflict resolution for exactly the opposite reason stating that online group conflict resolution was similar to road rage as it emboldened people to create conflict:

*“Basically, it's almost like I can say you know when you driving in your car you have that barrier around you that now you think you're invincible and everyone can go jump off for a mountain versus if I talk to you face to face, I'm not going to behave the same way as if I was in my own little car thinking I'm a hero.”*

Lastly, concern was raised underestimating the “intrusiveness of being remote” (R13M21) about group work and online collaboration online. This ties into the concerns about the Greek concept of *oikos* and possibly changing dynamics in the home environment as a result of learning from home.

#### 5.3.4.3 Coding architecture and section summary

Figure 4 presents a graphical representation of how less definitive views were determined. The raw codes such as “AdminPresence”, “Conflict” and “DeEscalate” are represented by the rectangles. These were themed into the two subsections, represented by circles, of “Admin” and “Groups & Conflict” which form the three subsections of this section and fall under this section of the findings.

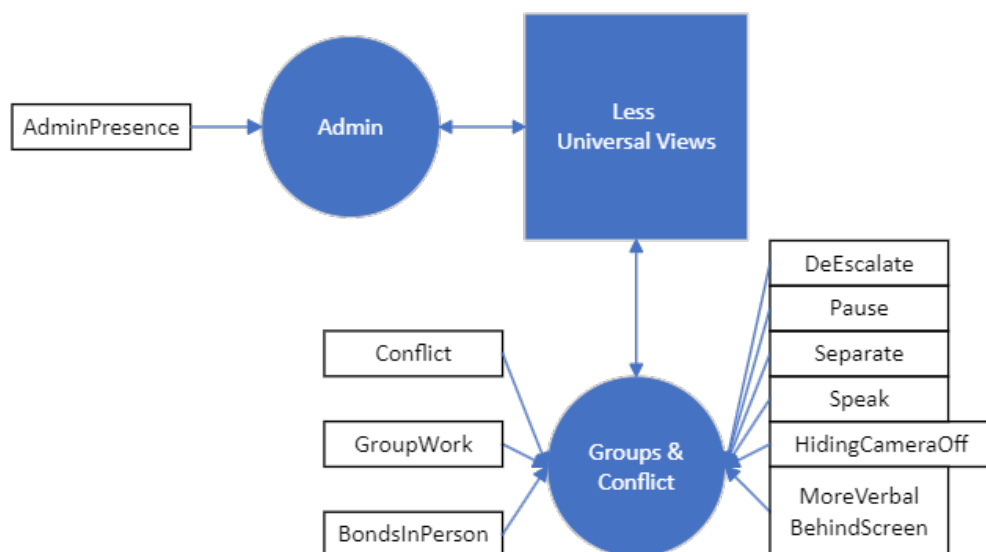


Figure 4: Less Universal Findings Coding Architecture

In summary, it was induced that a lack of physical presence from the administrative staff led to anxiety and a requirement to follow up on queries repeatedly. There was additional anxiety at exam time when one was not sure how to ask for assistance. Group work and conflict within groups provided vastly differing views. Some of the respondents commented that in person relationships would help prevent online misunderstandings, but other views supported online interaction as being less intense and enabling de-escalation and pausing of conflict.

#### 5.4 Chapter Conclusion & Themes

This chapter presented the findings of the research. These were organised in relation to the research questions with section 5.3.4 presenting additional findings. Table 3 presents a high-level view of the mapping of the research process, presented in Chapter 4. The table summarises the relationship between the research questions, raw codes and code categories. This led to the creation of themes which are used to form research propositions in the next Chapter. The themes and are discussed in sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 with the additional non research bound findings presented and discussed in section 6.4.

Table 3 : Research Proposition Formulation

Research Question	Codes	Category	Themes
1. What challenging experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education?	Non-Technical Disruption	Challenges*	1. EcoSystem Challenges
	PhysicalInfrastructure		
	PresentInPerson	Q8&MissingElements*	2. Physical Peer Interaction is critical
	HigherEngagementsInPerson		
	Orientation	MissingElements	3. Socio-economic issues are not mentioned
	LearningFromPeers		
	Networking		
ZoomLimitations	OtherChallenges		
Attention&Distractions			
HidingCamerasOff			
HomeCompartments			



Research Question	Codes	Category	Themes
2. What beneficial experiences did executive MBA students experience during emergency remote education?	Flexibility AvoidingTraffic	UniversalBenefits*	1. Schedule flexibility and traffic avoidance  2. Some interactions can be one way
	FamilyTime	OtherBenefits	
	OneWayLearning UnityInAdversity		
3. What elements of emergency remote education should be retained in executive MBA programs after the pandemic?	ExamPrep&Complacency ExamAtHome&Retention Integrity	Exams	1. Appeals for change and an exception of hybrid methods going forward  2. Keep exams online
	InteractiveElementsInPerson	Classroom&SocialAspect	
	Resilience		
	Retention	UniversityCall	
	TimesChangeBeFlexible IntentionalExclusion		
Less Universal Findings	Admin Presence	Admin	1. Opinions on remote group work and conflict are divided  2. The role of administrators is not clear
	Conflict GroupWork BondsInPerson		
	DeEscalate Pause Separate Speak HidingCamerasOff MoreVerbalBehindScreen	Groups&Conflict	

## **Chapter 6 – Discussion**

The previous, Chapter 5, presented the findings of the research which were organised around the three research questions. An additional section describing other additional findings, which were not directly related to any particular research question, were presented. Through the presentation of the findings, the raw codes and their categories were used to create themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. These themes are used in this chapter to form research propositions. These themes are analysed in relation to the findings and the literature review, presented in Chapter 2. The research questions, presented in Chapter 3, will be used as a guiding and organising framework to help unpack the results, organise the themes and provide contributions to the understanding of the experience of executive MBA students who learned from home. This was argued as distinctive from other students in Chapter 1.

### **6.1 Research Question One – Challenging Experiences**

Research question 1 sought to examine the challenging experiences of executive MBA students while learning from home. After examining the findings, presented in the previous chapter, the various challenges were organised into themes. These themes were used to form propositions that were derived from the discussion in this section. While these propositions are discussed in relation to the literature, the exploratory nature of the research, and the identified niche focus on executive MBA students, means that an attempt was made for the propositions to go beyond confirmation or disputing of what was found in existing literature.

#### **6.1.1 Ecosystem challenges**

Section 2.4.1.1 of the literature presented arguments that emergency remote education in response to the pandemic resulted in the removal of critical traditional support structures which would normally assist with learning experiences (Hodges et al., 2020). These support structures formed a metaphorical ecosystem that extended beyond academic work to sport, recreation, orientation and cultural activities with authors placing emphasis on the importance of mental health (Gillis & Krull, 2020; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022; Toquero, 2020).

In examining the responses of executive MBA students, presented in Chapter 5, no mention of campus support services or this metaphorical ecosystem were made. This supports the notion that executive MBA students, normally located on a different campus, have different needs. Rather than complain about a lack of campus support structures, the respondents placed emphasis on new challenges in the home environment. These included non-technical disruptions (discussed in section 5.3.1.1.2) such as neighbours, visitors and family members (toddlers, in particular). Respondents indicated a need to compartmentalise their homes (discussed in section 5.3.1.2.4) with a dedicated space for learning and the need to make certain purchases that support a comfortable learning space. This was necessary to isolate oneself from distraction and send a mental trigger to oneself and their families that they are in a different environment.

The need for isolation in the home led to new dynamics where interruptions in the home environment were common. Concern was raised about the increased flexibility leading to more regular meetings causing high availability for class and group work interactions. Concern was also raised that invasive disruptions to the family space could arise from this high availability. This ties into Mazzara et al's (2022) Greek concept of *oikos* (section 2.4.1.1) which involved blurring lines between home and work environments and possibly compromising the sacredness of the home. While some challenging dynamics in the home environment were presented, section 5.3.2.2.1 also provided evidence of enhanced family interactions due to the ability to have quick micro interactions between sessions.

Essentially it is proposed that executive MBA students have different needs as they appear to be less concerned with traditional campus support services and the metaphorical ecosystem they provide. Rather they had to be concerned with a different ecosystem. The ecosystem at home which was disrupted and involved new dynamics and compartmentalisation. This leads to the first proposition:

*Executive MBA students need a supportive home ecosystem while learning from home. This differs from traditional campus support systems.*

### **6.1.2 Physical Peer interaction is critical**

The exploratory nature of this research called for the examination of the special needs to executive MBA students. Literature presented in Chapter 2 raised concern about tech fatigue in section 2.4.1.3 (Conrad et al., 2022), leading to concerns raised in section 2.4.1.2, about a lack of motivational stimulation from participants not being aware of the mood of other participants (Mishra et al., 2020) and a lack of a mental trigger to signal that they are in a different place which leads to a need for more discipline (Mazzara et al., 2022). This lazy way could be connected to Saba's (2011) concerns, presented in section 2.3, about transactional distance and poor interactions effecting learner to learner, learner to instructor and learner to material dynamics as a result of distance learning.

The findings, in section 5.3.1.1.3, presented the findings in response to research instrument question 8 in which 18 out of 22 participants indicated a preference for in person classroom interactions. The respondents acknowledged the convenience of the online environment and learning from home, but indicated preference from the enhanced interaction from learning from interacting physical classrooms. Section 5.3.1.2.2 also presented findings relating to one's own attention being a barrier to effective interaction due to a lack of physical interaction causing one to get bored and easily distracted.

Inhibitors to the online learning experience were caused by class participants having their cameras off (presented in section 5.3.1.2.3) having limited icebreakers due to induction and introductions being limited (section 5.3.1.3.1) and most significantly a loss of networking opportunities (section 5.3.1.3.2) which one respondent indicated is a critical part of the MBA and a "*part of what you pay for*" (R13M21) and another respondent felt "*robbed*" (R12M21).

The severity of the difference was captured by respondent R7M21 who compared online learning to listening to an audio book; there the audio continues despite circumstance. In contrast, in person learning is like reading a physical book, where the reader engages with the material and the book does not carry on reading itself. This analogy ties into Dreyfus (2001) notion (presented in section 2.3) that online interactions are limited due to a lack of telepresence. This was presented in 2001,

before the creation of Zoom or Microsoft Teams, which could be perceived as providing telepresence, the complaints about the ability to turn cameras off indicate a lack of online interactions capturing the participants whole being, thereby leading to a lack of the emotional involvement created by positive and negative experiences which Dreyfus (2001) highlighted as critical for learning.

The findings provided two examples of this. Firstly, a preference to make presentations to the class in person was identified. While online presentations were acknowledged as more convenient there was acknowledgement of the importance of the mental tension involved in facing one's peers on a podium and presenting which could only be done in person in class. Secondly, the importance of being able to learn from observation (presented in section 5.3.1.3.3) and interacting informally with peers was identified as lacking. Participants indicated a desire to speak to fellow learners during gaps in order to engage on the content further. A concern was also raised about online interactions leading to a subset of the class, the 5 or 6 most vocal members becoming dominant (presented in section 5.3.1.2.3) as a result of their having their cameras on and engaging more online.

These findings can be tied back into Saba's (2011) concepts of transactional distance. It appears that online interactions inhibited learner-to-learner and learner-to-lecturer interactions due to the ability to switch off cameras and the lack of emotional involvement from telepresence. In addition to concerns about screen fatigue, lack of mental triggers that cause one to switch to a learning mode were raised and could be categorised as psychological concerns. The focus of these concerns appeared to be centred around a lack of rich interaction as opposed to a lack of belonging expressed as problematic for younger learners deprived of their metaphorical ecosystem of support.

This leads to the formulation of the second research proposition that:

*Executive MBA students value in person peer interaction as a critical part of their growth. These interactions are primarily related to having rich interactions with peers rather than feeling a sense of belonging.*

### **6.1.3 Socioeconomic issues are not mentioned**

The findings of the literature survey, mostly presented in section 2.4.1.3, suggested that technical inhibitors and limitations would have a disproportionate effect on those learners from low socio-economic backgrounds due to lack of access to devices (Mishra et al., 2020; Ng, 2022).

It was suggested that inequality could stem from lack of access to the standard infrastructure, provided by the campus metaphorical ecosystem discussed in section 6.1.1, and learners not being able to sustain temporary independent solutions (Gillis & Krull, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021) leading to connectivity issues and technical failures. Literacy and the ability to adapt to the new platform were also identified as a potential inhibitor to online interactions (Conrad et al., 2022; Li, 2022).

The findings were examined and compared against these three concerns and a definite absence of expression of concerns about socio-economic issues was noted. Only one respondent concerned about device inadequacy and stated that he simply purchased a new laptop. In terms of connectivity and physical infrastructure, discussed in section 5.3.1.1.1, concerns were raised almost universally. These concerns were related to the South African phenomenon of load shedding which involves disruptions to the electricity supply which affects all sections of society. One participant did mention concern about having to purchase mobile data, but the concern was centred around mindfulness of not running out of data rather than cost of data. Lastly, as presented in section 5.3.1.2.1, concerns about ease of use stemming from literacy and uncertainty about etiquette on the new platform were raised. While expressions of apprehension and adaption were raised, no instances of learning being fundamentally inhibited were expressed.

It appears that socio economic concerns are less relevant among executive MBA students. This could be due to the later in life phase at which executive MBA students enrol but could also stem from an underrepresentation of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This leads to the formation of a third research proposition:

*Executive MBA students appear less concerned with socio-economic issues due to their being in more established phases of their lives*

#### **6.1.4 Concluding Remarks**

This section presented three propositions that emerged from examining the findings in relation to the literature review. It has been proposed that executive MBA students had different challenging experience as a result of emergency remote education. The first difference involved less reliance on traditional campus support systems and more focus on new dynamics emerging in the home environment as a result of learning from home. Secondly, psychological concerns were more focused around lack of interaction and peer to peer interactions being limited as opposed to feelings of a lack of belonging. Lastly, concerns normally associated with people from lower socio-economic backgrounds was absent.

Three research propositions were presented and could lead to further research. These propositions are:

1. *Executive MBA students need a supportive home ecosystem while learning from home. This differs from traditional campus support systems.*
2. *Executive MBA students value in person peer interaction as a critical part of their growth. These interactions are primarily related to having rich interactions with peers rather than feeling a sense of belonging.*
3. *Executive MBA students appear less concerned with socio-economic issues due to their being in more established phases of their lives.*

This section presented a discussion of the findings and literature related to research question 1. The following section examines research question 2.

#### **6.2 Research Question Two – Beneficial Experiences**

Research question 2 sought to examine the beneficial experiences of executive MBA students while learning from home. After examining the findings presented in the previous chapter, the various beneficial sentiments were organised into propositions. While these propositions are discussed in relation to the literature, the exploratory nature of the research, and the identified niche focus on executive MBA students, means that an attempt was made for the propositions to go beyond confirmation or disputing of what was found in existing literature.

### **6.2.1 Convenience is caused by schedule flexibility and avoiding traffic**

The existing literature, presented in Chapter 2, stated that enhanced schedule flexibility, as well as the ability to connect from any location, (discussed in section 2.4.2.4), resulted in lower administrative costs for both course organisers and learners. An enhanced sense of instructor responsiveness and availability was also evident (discussed in section 2.4.2.1) with an unexpected lack of cognitive overload from multiple channels of information not being identified as an inhibitor (Conrad et al., 2022) to participation. The universal reach of the pandemic had a positive impact on awareness with there being less stigma around discussion of mental health concerns (discussed in section 2.4.2.5).

The findings, which sought to examine the special beneficial experiences of executive MBA students mostly concurred with the findings of the existing literature with enhanced flexibility (discussed in section 5.3.2.1.2) being identified as beneficial. In addition, although mental health was not mentioned by the respondents, the sense of unity in adversity (discussed in section 5.3.2.2.3) and a recognition of shared or “*common trauma*” (R16F21) appeared to indicate an openness to share trials thereby echoing the sentiments of there being less stigma round mental health concerns. This tied into the slightly abstract concept of resilience (presented in section 5.3.3.2.2) which argued that the pandemic itself was a beneficial experience as it led to a sense of humility and growth through increased self-belief in one’s own adaptably.

While most of the beneficial findings confirm what was found in literature in studies about undergraduate and first-time learners, a unique point was raised among the executive MBA students about the materially significant amount of time saved by the avoidance of traffic (discussed in section 5.3.2.1.1). This enabled enhanced preparation, family time and in some cases saved more than 2 hours of travel time. It is suggested that this benefit was not expressed in undergraduate studies as accommodation and campus transport forms part of the metaphorical ecosystem provided to learners. As expressed by Dreyfus (2001), in section 2.3.1, one of the four main purposes of a university was the presence of a physical library that students could gather around.



These findings and their relation to existing literature led to the development of the fourth research proposition:

*Schedule flexibility and traffic avoidance is the biggest benefit of learning from home during emergency remote education.*

### **6.2.2 Some interactions can be one way**

Section 6.1.2 identified a desire among executive MBAs to have in person interactions. Saba's (2011) model and concept of transactional distance was used to demonstrate inhibitors to learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructor interactions as a result of emergency remote education. Section 2.4.2.2 presented literature of the advent of asynchronous materials as a result of the pandemic indicating that these methods enabled more self-paced learning.

The findings, presented in section 5.3.2.2.2, indicated that executive MBA students, while mostly preferring in person interactions as presented in section 6.1.2, find some one-way interactions as beneficial. These included administrative work, lectures where it is possible to do asynchronous preparation and workshops where a large portion of the communication was from the lecturer to the student. This suggests enhanced learner to material interactions which is the third element of Saba's (2011) transactional distance model.

It is proposed that while executive MBA students prefer in person interaction, as indicated in section 6.1.2, there is a recognition that the elements of the course which require less interaction could be conducted remotely. This leads to the fifth research proposition:

*Some elements of an executive MBA lend themselves to hybrid and distance methods and some elements do not.*

### **6.2.3 Concluding Remarks**

This section presented two propositions that emerged from examining the findings in relation to the literature review. It has been proposed that executive MBA students had similar beneficial experiences to undergraduates as result of emergency remote

education in terms of flexibly but had additional benefits due to an ability to avoid lengthy travel. In addition, although executive MBA students indicated a preference for in person classes, as presented in section 6.1.2, the advent and use of asynchronous material and remote sessions for more one directional, instructive session was identified as beneficial.

Two research propositions were presented and could lead to further research. These propositions are:

1. *Schedule flexibility and traffic avoidance is the biggest benefit of learning from home during emergency remote education.*
2. *Some elements of an executive MBA lend themselves to hybrid and distance methods and some elements do not.*

This section presented a discussion of the findings and literature related to research question 2. The following section examines research question 3.

### **6.3 Research Question Three – Calls for method retention**

Research question 3 sought to examine the instances where executive MBA students called for retention of the experiences or methods that were employed while learning from home. After examining the findings presented in the previous chapter, the various challenges were organised into propositions. While these propositions are discussed in relation to the literature, the exploratory nature of the research, and the identified niche focus on executive MBA students, means that an attempt was made for the propositions to go beyond confirmation or disputing of what was found in existing literature.

The existing literature, presented in section 2.5, indicated almost universal calls for examination and retention of emergency remote education efforts in response to the pandemic. These were motivated by suggestions that other similar events could occur (Whittle et al., 2020) and that the various entities in the pandemic were like subjects in an experiment and it would be unscientific to ignore findings of an event with such global significance (Williamson et al., 2020).

The term sustained remote teaching was proposed by Stewart & Lowenthal (2022) who called for a move away from emergency practices towards more sustainable practices more aligned with normal online and distance education. Lastly, Soliman et al (2022) identified significant increase in MBA and DBA enrolments, with no reason provided, during the pandemic leading one to question if the increase was due to the availability of emergency remote education.

The previous sections linked literature to the related findings and groups them into sub-sections which formed propositions. In this section the literature, presented above mostly called for retention of learnings with no specific predictions or practices recommended. Therefore, a brief summary of the literature calling for examination and retention of learnings was presented and is followed by sub sections presenting the various research propositions derived from the analysis into findings in relation to the literature.

### **6.3.1 Appeals for change and an expectation of hybrid methods going forward**

The findings indicated that as the pandemic wended down and the lockdowns became less strict, the graduate institutes appeared to gradually go back to traditional methods. This transition period, described in section 5.3.3.3, was perplexing as some students went as far as to state that there was a feeling of intentional exclusion of learners who were attending online where instructors had intentional disregard for people attending online.

As presented previously, the respondents were aware of the benefits and cautioned against losing the in class social interaction through the more interactive elements of courses, presented in section 5.3.3.2.1, but still called for retention of some of the sessions online as presented in section 6.2.2. This call for retention was supported by the suggestions of hybrid attendance models where quotas could be used to prescribe a minimum mix of online and in person attendance. These suggestions were motivated by the notions that the world had changed and the and a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) landscape meant that having rigid traditional structures were not appropriate as people often travelled for work and were not bound by one country. This echo's the sentiments of Stewart (2019) who raised concerns for the needs of transnational students. One statement went as far

as to claim the hypocrisy of graduate schools who teach about being agile but were very eager to go back to traditional methods.

Lastly, respondent R1F21 made a statement that *“I hate to think if I ever want to pursue an MBA, I have to be in every class”* and went further to state that a two-year commitment to one physical location was too daunting. This statement in line with Soliman et al.'s (2022) identification of increased enrolment during the pandemic lead to the formulation of a research proposition.

This discussion leads to a suggestion of a wider investigation into enrolment during the pandemic and an analysis into more accessibility through hybrid methods. This leads to the formation of the sixth research proposition:

*Enhanced schedule flexibility through hybrid methods can lead to increases in enrolment.*

### **6.3.2 Keep exams online**

Section 6.2.2 presented a research proposition suggesting further research to examine which elements are one-way and could therefore be conducted through the remote means. The findings relating to exams and exam preparation, which could be argued as one-way, indicate a preference for exams to be conducted online.

It was identified that the asynchronous material enabled self-paced revision and that the ability to take screenshots during a lecture and make notes was useful. The most critical aspect was the availability of lecture recordings that could be reviewed enabling better preparation for lectures. Furthermore, the actual taking of the exam in online format was identified as a beneficial. Reasons included better preparation with templates, avoiding having to write with pen and paper and reduced anxiety of having to travel to an exam venue.

These factors lead to the seventh research proposition that:

*Online completion of exams should form the new standard for executive MBA programs.*

### **6.3.3 Concluding Remarks**

This section presented two propositions that emerged from examining the findings in relation to the literature review. It was found that the findings echoed the call of literature to examine more agile and flexible offerings which could lead to better participation going forward. A call to retain online examinations was also present.

Two research propositions were presented and could lead to further research. These propositions are:

1. *Enhanced schedule flexibility through hybrid methods can lead to increases in enrolment.*
2. *Online completion of exams should form the new standard for executive MBA programs.*

This section presented a discussion of the findings and literature related to research question 3. The following section examines some additional findings induced and not bound by and particular research question.

## **6.4 Additional Findings**

The previous sections of this chapter examined challenging, research question 1, beneficial, research question 2, experiences of executive MBA students in relation to established literature. A discussion of research question 3 was then presented which involved call for retention of practices. In line with the inductive exploratory nature of this research which is based in the context of unrepresented world events (Oliveira et al., 2021), it was decided to include this section to discuss some findings that were not related to any particular research question.

### **6.4.1 Opinions on remote group work and conflict are divided**

The literature review did not explore or present remote education and its relationship with group work or conflict resolution. It did, however, find historical literature that expressed the importance of peer-to-peer interactions (Saba, 2011) and the importance of emotional involvement in learning (Dreyfus, 2001). While some challenges and benefits were expressed in relation to group work most responses

contradicted each other with the area of group conflict being identified as the area that attracted the most diverse views.

Challenging aspects included a lack of commitment from group members due to their cameras being off (presented in section 5.3.4.2.1). This meant that it was difficult to read people and where people could hide behind their web cameras and not take a stance on a matter of someone speaking was unsure of where their group stood on a matter. One could argue these constitute inhibited peer-to-peer interactions and a lack of emotional involvement with one's group members. Beneficial aspects included increased flexibility and co-ordination due to people not having to agree and travel to a physical location and could engage in more agile focused meetings.

Discussion about the areas of conflict indicated that many conflicts could be prevented by richer in person interactions and relationships and rapport being formed (presented in section 5.3.4.2.3) by creating bonds in person. This appears to negate and outweigh the scheduling benefits expressed earlier. Moving beyond conflict avoidance, some participants indicated a preference citing that it was easier for people to pause or deescalate conflict and also easier for introverts to find a voice and speak up (presented in section 5.3.4.2.4). This could be interpreted as a contradiction to the notion that web cameras being turned off is a challenge. The exact opposite opinion was stated that online interaction resulted in bullies becoming emboldened and saying things while hidden behind their screen (presented in section 5.3.4.2.5). Concern was also raised about having group meetings and conflict resolution while learning from home as this could be invasive.

#### **6.4.2 The role of administrators in emergency remote education was not clear**

The findings relating to administration, presented in section 5.3.4.1 indicated opinions on administration of courses were divided. For the most part, respondents had no comment or preference. At one extreme, some respondents indicated the lack of a physical presence of administrators led to a lack of accountability which resulted in email communication being lost with a requirement to send multiple follow-ups. The other extreme view indicated that online and in person methods were equally problematic as the respondents were not aware who the administrators were. A possible reason for this could be the design of the research instrument. Questions

about administrative issues were only prompted in two places, question 6.2 for challenges and question 7.2 for beneficial experiences. In some instances, respondents were confused about what was meant by administration. Therefore, it is proposed that further research be conducted into possible best practices for executive MBA administration.

## **6.5 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings of Chapter 5 in relation to the literature review in Chapter 2. The three research questions were used as an organising framework for this chapter. The inductive and exploratory nature meant the findings went beyond the research questions and some findings, not related to the research questions were presented. In summary seven research propositions were formed in relation to the various research questions and the experiences of executive MBA students during emergency remote education and while learning from home.

Section 6.1 presented propositions relating to Research Question 1 which was focussed on the challenging experiences. Three research propositions relating to the need for a home learning support ecosystem, the crucial importance of rich interactions with peers and a lack of presence of socioeconomic concerns due to executive MBAs being at a more established phase in their lives were presented.

Section 6.2 presented propositions relating to Research Question 2 which was focussed on beneficial experiences. These involved further analysis into travel avoidance and a call to examine which elements of courses could permanently remain online due to their less interactive nature. The first proposition suggested that schedule flexibility and traffic avoidance was the most beneficial aspect of learning from home while the second proposition suggested that some elements of executive MBA programs lend themselves to hybrid education more than others.

Section 6.3 presented propositions relating to Research question 3 which was focussed on calls for retention of methods employed during emergency remote

education. Research propositions suggested that increased flexibility could lead to increases in enrolment and that online exams could form a new standard practice for executive MBA programs.

Lastly, section 6.4 presented additional findings that were not related to any specific research questions. These involved calls for further research into group work, thereby conflict resolution and the role of administrators and their presence in facilitating emergency remote education while learning from home.



## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduced the COVID-19 pandemic as a once in a lifetime event that had a globally relevant impact on higher education. This is quantified by the fact that as many as 1.5 billion students were effected worldwide (Oliveira et al., 2021). The research highlighted that many responses to the pandemic relied on use of emergency remote education and existing practices that had previously been rejected in favour of traditional face-to-face class methods. In addition, the forced adoption of distance learning methods had never occurred in the history of distance education providing a unique opportunity to examine adoption of these practices. With these factors in mind, and an almost universal call for examination of the effects of the pandemic on education (Stewart et al., 2022), the research set out motivated by the once in a life time unique circumstances, to explore emergency remote education and its use in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research focus evolved after examining the literature which revealed a focus on high school or first time learners. This evolution led the current research to choose to take a niche focus on executive MBA students. This was due to the lack of literature but also the arguments presented that executive MBA students may have differing needs to undergraduate or first time learners.

It was also identified that the home environment may lead to special considerations during emergency remote education. These elements were used through an iterative process to form the title “Learning from home: “COVID-19 and the use of emergency remote education for executive MBA students.”

The main objective of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of the emergency remote education, the pandemic, and learning in the home environment from the perspective of executive MBA students. Practically this involved the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews to draw out deep accounts of both challenging and beneficial experiences as well as explicit calls for retention of emergency remote education practices.

In this endeavour the research was successful in meeting the objectives it set out for itself as has gathered insight into the special niche experience of executive MBA students. The research did not only provide insight into the specific challenges, benefits and calls for retention of practices, it went further to provide additional insights induced from the sample of respondents.

This chapter concludes by offering a high-level overview of the key conclusions induced by the framework of the guiding research questions. It will also provide a summary of theoretical and practical contributions. This is followed by the presentation of the research limitations and suggestions for future research in this domain.

## **7.1 Principal Conclusions**

This section discusses the conclusions of the findings of the research in relation to each research question. An additional section (7.1.4) presents additional findings that were induced and provided insight beyond the research questions.

### **7.1.1 Research Question One – Challenges of ERE**

Research question one set out with the intention of drawing out reflective accounts of executive MBA students and their challenging experiences of emergency remote education while learning from home.

Literature identified a lack of traditional campus support systems (Hodges et al., 2020), limited in class interactions and motivational issues (Mazzara et al., 2022) and various types of technical issues and limitations (Conrad et al., 2022; Gillis & Krull, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020) limiting effective participation.

Among the sample of executive MBA students, concern about access to traditional campus support systems was not expressed. The prominent challenges were related to physical infrastructure, non-technical disruptions from various entities in the home environment, a feeling of being robbed of in person peer to peer interactions as well as rich and meaningful inductions or orientation and networking. Other challenges

included limitations of online interactions due to platform usage, attention and distractions, lack of camera usage and a requirement to isolate oneself in the home environment.

In summary, while some findings appear similar to those of first time students, this research identified special nuances relevant and specific to executive MBA students. These included special considerations while being in the home environment and a need for peer interactions. The research question was therefore answered by providing findings of challenging experiences specific to executive MBA students in the home environment.

### **7.1.2 Research Question Two – Benefits of ERE**

Research question two set out with the intention of drawing out reflective accounts of executive MBA students and their beneficial experiences of emergency remote education while learning from home. Literature relating to COVID-19 indicated that increased responsiveness from high lecturer availability (Ng, 2022) was beneficial in addition to the increased use of asynchronous learning material (Bond, 2021; Gillis & Krull, 2020). Other benefits included reduction of some administrative costs (Mazzara et al., 2022; Ng, 2022) as well as a greater acceptance of mental health awareness due to the common experience of the pandemic (Toquero, 2020).

In line with the literature, unity in adversity and the sense of common purpose from a globally disruptive event was identified as a motivator, while the benefits of one-way asynchronous interactions for certain fewer interactive elements of the course was highlighted. The ability to have microbreaks and spend those microbreaks with family members was identified as important to reduce stress in the home environment. The most prominent themes were the almost universal relief at avoiding traffic and the appreciation of the convenience of schedule flexibility arising from having recordings and not having to attend at a physical site.

In summary, while some findings appear similar to those of first time students, there was niche focus on identifying circumstances unique to executive MBA students, such as the mention of family and the ability to avoid traffic, which is not a concern

for undergraduates would normally have campus accommodation. The research question was therefore answered by providing findings of beneficial experiences specific to executive MBA students who were learning in the home environment.

### **7.1.3 Research Question Three – Calls for retention of ERE practices**

Research question three aimed to identify elements which executive MBA students felt should be retained and made part of the normal academic offering after the end of the pandemic.

Literature in this area did not yield any specific findings but rather highlighted the need for introspection, reflection and argued that leaving such an event unexamined while returning to traditional methods would be wasteful (Ng, 2022; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022; Williamson et al., 2020). The findings showed support for the retention of online exams, a call for retention of in person interactive elements but also call for universities to be more agile and offer more flexible hybrid models going forward. The findings therefore supported the literatures call for simply making a return to pre-pandemic practices.

In summary, the research question was answered by specific calls for retention of practices, by executive MBA students, were found and presented.

### **7.1.4 Additional findings**

In addition to answering the three research questions, the inductive exploratory thematic analysis identified diverse views on the role of administrators, the dynamics of group work and the dynamics of conflict resolution. In terms of administrators some respondents indicated that their experience was inhibited by a lack of physical presence while others felt no difference.

In terms of group work and conflict resolution, views contradicted each other with some supporting online methods as empowering for introverts and creating easier de-escalation while others directly contradicted this stating that conflict resolution through distance methods created emboldened bullies who exhibit behaviours similar to road rage. These findings demonstrate the breadth of the impact of the

pandemic on education and the vastly different perceptions and attitudes towards this shared experience.

## **7.2 Theoretical Contribution**

The research has examined two gaps in existing literature relating to emergency remote education. Firstly, it has provided initial insight on executive MBA students, where other studies focused on first time or high school learners. Secondly, the forced nature (Chiu, 2022) of the adoption of previous rejected methods (Mazzara et al., 2022) as a result of this unprecedented event (Conrad et al., 2022) meant that literature did not exist examining forced adoption on such a scale.

The research successfully addresses these gaps in existing literature as the completion of the study resulted in the successful answer of the three research questions, as well as some additional findings and the formulation of seven research propositions. The focused position on executive MBA students, who are more established and at a later stage in their lives, mean that the findings of this research provide additional literature to the body of knowledge around the areas of emergency remote education, learning from home and education after the end of COVID-19.

The seven propositions derived from the completion of the research are listed:

1. *Executive MBA students need a supportive home ecosystem while learning from home. This differs from traditional campus support systems.*
2. *Executive MBA students value in person peer interaction as a critical part of their growth. These interactions are primarily related to having rich interactions with peers rather than feeling a sense of belonging.*
3. *Executive MBA students appear less concerned with socio-economic issues due to their being in more established phases of their lives.*
4. *Schedule flexibility and traffic avoidance is the biggest benefit of learning from home during emergency remote education.*
5. *Some elements of an executive MBA lend themselves to hybrid and distance methods and some elements do not.*

6. *Enhanced schedule flexibility through hybrid methods can lead to increases in enrolment.*
7. *Online completion of exams should form the new standard for executive MBA programs.*

### **7.3 Implications for relevant stakeholders**

The findings of the research are relevant to various stakeholders involved with executive MBA education. Guidelines for orientation could be formed to assist future students. Business schools can assess the findings and seek to apply learnings to enhance their offerings. The propositions also serve as a basis for further research which could be of interest to the academic and administrative staff within business schools.

### **7.4 Limitations of the research**

Rigor was ensured by seeking out respondents beyond the point of saturation who were encouraged to speak freely after which multiple quality assurance checks were conducted on the raw data. However, as mentioned in the research design in Chapter 4, the scale of the crisis which effected over 1.5 billion learners in different geographic regions (Oliveira et al., 2021) combined with time constraints of this research meant that a sample, no matter how rigorously treated, can truly be representative of the global executive MBA learner population.

The lack of international respondents means that cultural aspects, time zone differences and the trails of transitional students, raised by (Stewart, 2019) as problematic, were not assessed. The students who began their studies in 2020 did so before the advent of the pandemic. In contrast the students who began their studies in 2021 did so during the pandemic. The factors influencing enrolment of the 2020 and 2021 students where not assessed. Assessing this could have provided insight into possible relationships between the availability of hybrid methods and enrolment figures. This could be classified as a limitation as it represents a lost opportunity.

## 7.5 Suggestions for future research

Further research could include testing of the seven identified propositions. The findings of the research could also be used to form a quantitative survey that seeks to examine the experience of emergency remote education while learning from home that goes beyond individual course evaluations.

Furthermore, the additional findings section, which did not yield definitive results could provide an opportunity to conduct more deliberate and focused research into the role of administrators in facilitating emergency remote education. In addition to this, the vastly diverse and contradictory views could provide motivation and an opportunity to examine online group dynamics and conflict resolution during emergency remote education while learning from home with a bigger sample of learners.

## 7.6 Concluding remarks

This research concludes by emphasising the sentiment that learning and competence development requires engagement with a range of scenarios leading to both positive and negative emotional experiences leading to the formation of an arsenal of insight to deal with differing situations (Dreyfus (2001). The statement made by R7M21 represents a view of the difference between emergency remote education and in class participation:

*“I can almost give it a comparison to reading a physical book or listening to an audio book. It's easier to zone out in an audio book and miss five sentences versus reading an actual book I have to pay attention if I stop reading the lines while it's not going to read itself.”*

As discussed in Chapter 5. An audio book continues regardless of the level of engagement of the listener but engaging with a physical book can only lead to progress with active engagement. Hopefully further research will involve reading and engaging with the learnings from the pandemic rather than simply listening to findings in the area and treating the pandemic as a one in a lifetime event with no useful lessons. Deep introspection and study will result in an answer to the universal call to retain learnings from the pandemic thereby enhancing learning experiences.

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## Appendices

*Exhibit - 1: Respondent Classification (discussed in section 5.1)*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Q2 - Year</b>	<b>Q3 - First Experience</b>	<b>Q4 - Expected Online</b>	<b>Q5 - Venue</b>
R1F21	2021	Yes	Unsure	Home
R2M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R3F21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R4F21	2021	Yes	No	Home
R5F21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R6M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R7M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R8F21	2021	No	Yes	Home
R9F21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R10M21	2021	?	Yes	Home
R11M21	2021	Yes	No	Home
R12M21	2021	Yes	No	Home
R13M21	2021	No	Yes	Home
R14M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R15M21	2021	Yes	No	Home
R16F21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R17M20	2020	Yes	No	Home
R18M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R19M21	2021	Yes	No	Home
R20F21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R21M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home
R22M21	2021	Yes	Yes	Home

Exhibit - 2: Initial Rough Codes (discussed in section 5.2)

GKey	Key	Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1	2	Flexibility (self, group work, exam study)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	15	Important to Present in Person	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	9	Keep Interactive Elements In Person	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	10	Times change, can't expect 100% attendance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	8	Hiding when online (camera's off)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6	7	Avoid traffic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	3	Engagement higher in person (body signals)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8	16	Easier to present online	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9	17	Exam Prep Ease (keep recordings, allow screenshots)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	6	Exams at home	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	13	Bonds in person (conflict prevention)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	4	Family time	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13	5	Admin presence (queries, submission insecurity)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	1	Home Compartments & Screen fatigue	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
15	12	Intentional Exclusion of online people	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
16	14	Online Conflict Resolution (more vocal, hind behind screen, pause conflict, de-escalate)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
17	18	Physical Infrastructure	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18	11	Oneway teaching - Keep Online	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19	20	Non technical disruption	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
20	19	Networking & Learning from peers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
21	24	Introvert anxiety	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
22	21	Attention & distractions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
23	22	Zoom Limitations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
24	23	Resilience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
25	25	Q8 Preference	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
26	26	Zoom - Chat funnies & split attention	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
27	27	United in adversity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X



*Exhibit - 3: Research Question 1, quotes and phrases (discussed in section 5.3.1)*

<b>Section</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Phrases</b>
5.3.1.1.1 Physical Infrastructure	R14F21	we're living in South Africa and having the load shedding. So as much as you try to prepare maybe charge your laptop charge your phone and try to buy data or anytime those load shedding. It just really made it difficult to you know fully present in class and having the technology work for you	charge your laptop, charge your phone and try to buy data
5.3.1.1.1	R18M21	there was load shedding because at the time there was very poor cell phone signal coverage in my area and that actually caused a lot of anxiety particularly during online exams	very poor cell phone signal coverage
5.3.1.1.1	R18M21	A lot of I felt a lot of people could hide behind the veil of you know the technology and blame it. I remember last year, I had a terrible syndicate member who performed very poorly and he never made it into your two and they would often blame and technological issues for not delivering on things and I remember one day in particular where they said they couldn't join the syndicate meeting because they had loadshedding and we checked his area and he didn't have loadshedding. So he was clearly caught out lying	behind the veil of technology / clearly caught out lying
5.3.1.1.1	R20F21	South African problem load shedding. So there was a time when we had a group member who's based in Pretoria where their area was out of electricity for three days and they ran out of battery they had to go to the office to charge their devices and, you know I think there were like a syndicate meeting or two that she couldn't join us and again that's because of you know, the unique telecom situation and then it also happened with another colleague, different time, again, loadshedding related.	out of electricity for three days and they ran out of battery
5.3.1.1.2 Non-technical disruptions	R6M21	I think interruptions so my wife would come in and say someone's at the gate or this needs to be done and you busy in a class so it distracts you. I'd say that mails pop up that you notice while you are focusing on class and sometimes you're responding. So you get distracted.	at the gate / needs to be done
5.3.1.1.2	R7M21	Yeah, I would say family. You know obviously if you're at home you can be easily distracted by other people that are also at home and wanting you to come and do such and such and I will quickly step away from my computer and that definitely inhibited inhibits the learning experience.	family / easily distracted by other people

5.3.1.1.2	R9F21	the biggest challenges for me is I'm a mom to a toddler. So ideally for me I would have loved to distance myself and go into a physical class where I can concentrate and not be distracted because if I'm away then she knows I'm away but if I'm here and if I'm in another room and although I set up a whole desk and set up or like an office and all of that, she still knows I'm here so I found that very distracting okay I couldn't just brush her away I also found like being at home or being online I would lose concentration a bit. So I wouldn't actively participate because it's it wasn't as free as you know putting your hands up in the class and talking I had to you know mute conscious of the camera and conscious of my surroundings I found that to be quite a challenge	biggest challenge / mom to a toddler
5.3.1.1.2	R10M21	Preparedness of a lecturer I don't think the lecturers were well versed in the new online way of teaching. So you know questions could be missed or they had technical or non-technical issues on their end and then we were left completely bewildered. There is less engagement from them in that regard and not always watching the screens or maybe they weren't set up enough.	completely bewildered due to their not being well versed in the new online way of teaching / always watching some of the screens.
5.3.1.1.2	R12M21	I mean it's just the distractions of firstly you know having someone else living in the house with you having pets you know those are the things noisy neighbours.	pets
5.3.1.1.2	R14F21	Yes, when my neighbours decide to mow the lawn or when dogs are barking and all that. So outside noise.	and neighbours deciding to mow the lawn
5.3.1.1.2	R21M21	Yeah, look when you are at home you have a family so there are lots of distractions that a family can cause, I have two small kids so if they want some attention often it takes away from my learning experience.	away from my learning experience
5.3.1.1.3 Question 8 and elements missing from online interactions	R1F21	when you're in class, always sort of bouncing ideas off members there and then so definitely a classroom experience certainly enhances learnings and I think there's not enough offline opportunities for you to be learning with other people you could really just be left in a total silo	bounce ideas off / total silo
5.3.1.1.3	R1F21	if we had more exposure standing in front of the classroom and talking it'd become a lot more easier, right. But there aren't enough opportunities even now currently, as we do the MBA	more exposure standing in front of the class room and taking

5.3.1.1.3	R7M21	I can almost give it a comparison to reading a physical book or listening to an audio book. It's easier to zone out in an audio book and miss five sentences versus reading an actual book I have to pay attention if I stop reading the lines while it's not going to read itself.	I can almost give it a comparison to reading a physical book or listening to an audio book. It's easier to zone out in an audio book and miss five sentences versus reading an actual book I have to pay attention if I stop reading the lines while it's not going to read itself.
5.3.1.1.3	R7M21	I would say just engagement with faculty and lecturers and also engagement with other students and learning from the insights and feeding off sort of you know body language and things from lecturers. Also, I'd say a challenge was just to stay motivated during lectures due to the fact that you're not actually in class and engaging with everyone else and things so it's easier to sort of lose focus.	insights and feeding off, sort of, you know, body language / easier to sort of lose focus
5.3.1.1.3	R8F21	Not have to go to class. Sometimes we could have done some things online. Just looking at the fact that times have changed, we need to try and move digital. So there is a need for people to be in class and there is a need that if one cannot be they can attend online. So maybe I'm leaning more towards online	times have changed, we need to try and move digital
5.3.1.1.3	R10M21	I think the lack of physical interaction often results in getting bored easily distracted rather. So you have to really concentrate and if the class moves in a different direction or if the lecturer loses you then you're lost for quite a time period. That was that was the big issue	getting bored easily
5.3.1.1.3	R10M21	Face to face. I think the benefits definitely outweigh the risks to online learning. There's way more interaction in my opinion. It's more stimulation. It's more engaging. It's more thought provoking. There are less technical issues. There's more preparedness there's more energy overall.	more stimulation / more engaging / though provoking
5.3.1.1.3	R11M21	major challenge was you know the ability to interact and see the reaction of your classmates when you actually have a have a specific question	see the reaction of your class

5.3.1.1.3	R13M21	the social aspect of it the interactive aspect of it the meeting people from different industries and peers within your industry and peers within your circle and something is missing from it when it's purely remote. I feel a hybrid to an extent misses that but I think if I if I was pushed to choose one or the other, I would probably choose in the in person in a classroom. I think also, there's the aspect of interaction with the, with the campus, I think you know part of the sort of experience of going to GIBS is the campus and being on campus. Meeting people and making use of the facilities	meeting people, interacting, forming relationships
5.3.1.1.3	R14F21	It's really hard to, you know, to read people's temperaments and how they really are and how you can connect with them. So it sort of made me to be a lot more reserved I would say then I usually am because I'm just sceptical of not really understanding the people on the other side of the screen	people's temperaments and how they really are and how you can connect with them made her a lot more reserved
5.3.1.1.3	R14F21	It's really hard to, you know, to read people's temperaments and how they really are and how you can connect with them. So it sort of made me to be a lot more reserved I would say then I usually am because I'm just sceptical of not really understanding the people on the other side of the screen	just sceptical of not really understanding people on the other side of the screen
5.3.1.1.3	R15M21	I preferred in person and the reason is that I've done I did present in person and online. I just found that I didn't get you know the reaction from the audience that the with you and they are listening and me paying attention. I didn't get that online and I literally just had to go with like they aren't paying attention and there is something that I'm really missing someone will stop me. I just couldn't gauge how well did I do outside of the content	getting reaction from the audience that they are with you
5.3.1.1.3	R16F21	You know and a lot of learning comes from observation as well or you know visual mentorship if I can put it that way. So, yeah, I think for me in this type of space, MBA level, definitely in person.	a lot of learning comes from observation as well or you know, visual mentorship

5.3.1.1.3	R16F21	I actually felt more pressure to do it from a virtual, you know, you'd think it would be better because it's so you're by yourself but actually felt more nervous to do it online and then I did it in person. I think either both of them are still a nervous experience but I think it's definitely better in person, you know, you can again, you can read the room you can make a joke, you know, and that's that those type of elements that make presentations nice to do, nice to observe and listen to you who difficult on their platform.	make a joke
5.3.1.1.3	R17M20	I think that you're doing instances you're doing yourself and obviously everyone else in the injustice as well because it's from those difficult situations and we actually grow and be comfortable.	difficult situations that cause us to actually grow and be comfortable
5.3.1.1.3	R17M20	Face to face. Specifically, in an in an MBA kind of context I think there's a lot of the soft skill development the engagement the immersion that comes with it, from a face to face environment, as opposed to online and yeah personally speaking that would be my preference.	soft skill development, the engagement, the immersion
5.3.1.1.3	R17M20	I think that the classroom experience I think it's significantly different in person and it's significantly better in person from building rapport and building cohesion	rapport and cohesion
5.3.1.1.3	R17M20	I think that you're doing instances you're doing yourself and obviously everyone else in the injustice as well because it's from those difficult situations and we actually grow and be comfortable.	doing yourself and obviously everyone else an injustice
5.3.1.1.3	R18M21	I believe deep down in the benefit of the face to face. So I would probably choose that option. I think it creates a more immersive experience and I suppose that just suits my specific personality type because I'm actively seeking out that sort of social learning engagement. If you if you know me, I'm trying to, you know, achieve at a higher level.	immersive experience / actively / that sort of social learning engagement
5.3.1.1.3	R18M21	it was difficult to kind of virtually read the room to you know express myself and share some knowledge and feel like I was making a contribution in the class. You know we had a chat function where we could chat. Sometimes people you didn't feel like people were reading that properly and I suppose there was miscommunications you know; a lot of people didn't turn their cameras on so you can kind of read their faces and that so sometimes discussions took a lot longer	did not feel like people were reading that properly

5.3.1.1.3	R18M21	I suppose I'm a bit traditional and old school, I would I suppose I would opt for the in person one trying to get the most out of it. Yeah, I think just one last thing to add is that there's different types of skill sets in presenting online versus presenting in person and for me it was much easier to present online than in person and I felt that I needed to experience that friction, mental friction of being on the spot with all the people physically, you know glaring at you and you're about to present something and there's all that anxiety about it because that that pressure you know creates resilience in you and I suppose helps you develop	presenting online versus presenting in person and it was much easier to present online / mental friction of being on the spot with all the people physically
5.3.1.1.3	R18M21	if you're trying to do an MBA and you want to be a big CEO of a company one day but you're unable to really stand up on a podium in front of a whole crowd and deliver meaningful message. I think that's a problem.	really stand up on a podium in front of a whole crowd and deliver a meaningful message
5.3.1.1.3	R21M21	Face to face I just think it aids the learning experience I am person who likes feeling the energy around me so when I feel that energy, I know how to respond to it. So definitely face to face for me.	feeling the energy around
5.3.1.1.3	R22M21	me with social anxiety there are many other factors or conveniences that are presented by studying online. Whereas there are people that you know feed off energies of others and being in class it works better for them. So it should be a choice rather than this is what our school says and this is what has to be done	social anxiety
5.3.1.2.1 Platform Limitations	R4F21	you can get distracted in class having both the chat functionality open to all classmates and then also being able to like watch the teacher or look at the board or whatever. So yeah, you know it can kind of like you know split your attention like do you look at the chat? Do you pay attention to what's being said? Or you know, displayed? So there was that as well. So you kind of had to monitor both?	chat functionality open to all classmates / split your attention
5.3.1.2.1	R5F21	Having the chat available to a person at the same time as the lecture goes on, is actually far less disruptive than putting up your hand in class. So in that sense it was actually more interactive where you would keep quiet because you don't want to disrupt the flow. Online you could make use of the chat while the lecture was	far less disruptive than putting up your hand in class / without disrupting the flow

		continuing. So you could interact without disrupting the flow that I liked.	
5.3.1.2.1	R15M21	If I didn't understand the concept I kind of tried my best to follow the conversation on chat instead of listening to the lecture. So it was a bit of juggling those two and it'll also just weird that I'm doing an MBA online, you know, knowing that or either having an image in my head that MBA supposed to be in a class in front of professors and classmates that are like not seeing people physically.	juggling / just weird
5.3.1.2.1	R15M21	Like there were some lectures that could manoeuvre both lecturing and then spotting what is said in the chats and actually giving insights to what exactly he or she was saying, you know, this was like, I would say with like, the HR strategy guy did that really well. Michelle did that really well and yeah, just seeing people being able to do that was really awesome and yeah, that's the plus and I'll get for that.	that could manoeuvre both lecturing and then spotting what is said in the chats.
5.3.1.2.1	R16F21	just getting that engagement and, you know, learning how to navigate the platforms and what the etiquette is like, I think it was a bit of a challenge at first, but then you know, you quickly get used to it and accustomed to it.	etiquette
5.3.1.2.1	R17M20	becoming accustomed to this new medium of learning which is not something I necessarily had experience with. I think that was the first thing.	becoming accustomed to this new medium of learning
5.3.1.2.1	R17M20	In an online or remote setting it's a lot more difficult because you don't want a situation where everyone's just talking on top of each other, it's a lot easier to you know, put your hand up and you can see who's got the hand up and know who doesn't have their hand up or whatever the case would be with in an online environment there are certain functions and tools on zoom and teams that cater for their from a reaction perspective or, you know, cameras on but people are a lot less not necessarily aware or kind of paying attention to it	everyone's just talking on top of each other
5.3.1.2.1	R17M20	So just asking someone, what is it or what is going on or if you may be stuck just kind of trying to clarify with someone else as opposed to hold the entire the entire session with the with an inquiry before you know actually what it was or whether it was really something worth querying. So I think I think that would be the two biggest challenges in that regard.	the entire session with an inquiry

5.3.1.2.2 Attention Deficit	R4F21	My own attention. Being distracted of being at home, which is why you need you need your own space. You need a dedicated space to walk in and pretend like you're in class and you know not get caught up on whatever else is happening at home.	own attention
5.3.1.2.2	R7M21	online where I think it's easier to zone out and you know miss a couple of things	zone out and miss a couple of things
5.3.1.2.2	R10M21	I think the lack of physical interaction often results in getting bored easily distracted rather. So you have to really concentrate and if the class moves in a different direction or if the lecturer loses you then you're lost for quite a time period. That was that was the big issue	the lack of physical interaction often results in getting bored easily, distracted rather.
5.3.1.2.2	R15M21	you could pay attention for the first 15 or 20 minutes but then it becomes a struggle to pay attention because you at home and you play for you have all these bad habits.	you could pay attention for the first 15 or 20 minutes but then it becomes a struggle to pay attention
5.3.1.2.2	R17M20	The third challenge is the concentration element because you're in a non-conductive learning environment or traditional learning environment, if I could call it that, rather and obviously, with that, there's a lot more distractions available, you're a lot sort of more susceptible to distractions, you're a lot less worried about what your perception might be, especially when your cameras are off. So distractions is a major, a major challenge as well. The last I think, sorry, the last last point is and I don't know if I'm getting too specific or not but the last last point is maybe an element of it is the passive learning that you lose out on	concentration element / more susceptible to distractions because you're a lot less worried about what your perception might be, especially when your cameras are off
5.3.1.2.3 Lack of camera usage	R5F21	you may end up not being as well prepared online as you would have been in the physical class being present in the physical class.	may end up not being as prepared online as you would have been in the physical class
5.3.1.2.3	R6M21	I also think that you can't really gauge people and how they feeling about certain topics unless their cameras on and a lot of people don't like to put the cameras on. So it's sometimes made reading the atmosphere but difficult.	really gauge people and how they feel about certain topics



5.3.1.2.3	R7M21	you are a lot more engaged in class than you are at home just purely because the lecturer can't see you all the time because of everyone on the screen and things. Also, the thing of having the ease of just turning your video off if you kind of don't feel like participating and so it's easier just to escape as it were and not be involved. If you were in class you know the lecture can feed off your body language and see you clearly that you're doing something else and not listening	easier just to escape as it were and not be involved
5.3.1.2.3	R8F21	you cannot see anyone and don't even have cameras on people share people speak up but when it's face to face you can actually see the expression and how the person body posture all those things, we tend to run away from dealing with conflict.	expression
5.3.1.2.3	R8F21	Yeah, sometimes people were there but not there, it could be that we were just aware that we need to work with we as a team but not necessarily that you can be there, some would be driving, some would actually contribute to could not hear them. Yes, people when you're not together the level of participation is obviously different than when you're online.	were there but not there
5.3.1.2.3	R11M21	you know the lecture tends to start concentrating on the guy that talks the most, that's what I found and the guys that talk the most just go on talking for the entire three-hour lecture. It's just been an it's suddenly at the end of it becomes five students and one lecturer kind of way. I understand that, you know, people are talking because no one else is talking.	tends to start concentrating on the guy that talks the most / at the end of it becomes five students and one lecturer dominating where no one else is taking
5.3.1.2.3	R12M21	Secondly without having the face to face again you know you're not really able to read the room and body language accordingly because, you know, sometimes people don't have they don't have the cameras on. So it's hard to communicate in a way	read the room and body language / hard to communicate in a way
5.3.1.2.3	R12M21	not being able to read body language or sometimes audio wasn't great. Apart from that there were I feel like the some of the challenges were they were like some students were I would say disruptive almost, in terms of you know, not letting the lecture actually lecture on what we were supposed to be learning and almost like diverting onto other topics. Apart from that, I don't think there were any other challenges.	not letting the lecturer actually lecture on what we were supposed to be learning and almost like diverting onto other topics

5.3.1.2.3	R13M21	I think there's that human interaction human aspect of the learning that that's missed and I think the same goes for being in a classroom with the lecturer think the lecture gets it becomes a two way conversation with the lecture rather than a one sided passive thing where you just sit and listen and ask one or two questions. So I think those were the main concerns from the active versus passive just sitting and consuming and the inability to sort of interact with them at a personal level.	one sided passive thing
5.3.1.2.3	R13M21	But I think actually, a lot of the class thrived on one or two people having a lot to say or asking a lot of questions because they didn't want to or didn't feel the need to. So I asked a lot of questions because I feel that that unless you do that there's an interaction missing from the class	one or two people having a lot to say or asking a lot of questions
5.3.1.2.3	R19M21	quality of the information dissemination was not as was not as good as when attending physically so there was a loss of quality of information dissemination. There was low class participation so you had some class members who would switch off the cameras would never participate. So that would lead to a loss in the opportunity to learn and then I think so it's yeah so that those are the challenges. Yeah, I think that's the main challenge is more about the quality of information dissemination as well as nonparticipation by other class members which leads to a loss of opportunity to learn.	loss of quality of information dissemination / lower class participation / switch off the cameras / never participate leading to a loss in the opportunity to learn
5.3.1.2.3	R20F21	there's something that I think is lost in the virtual environment especially because a lot of people prefer to switch their cameras off. So with that, I don't think the level of engagement is the same as being you know on site in class. You miss out on body language, you know you practically just relying on voice because for most people besides the lecturer you know would switch off their cameras even if they were talking. So, I think that that was the first thing the virtual platform the downside is that people prefer to keep their cameras off. Well, most people or a lot of people, and, and as a result, as I say, you know, I'll put the, you know, nonverbal, and even on communicate, I think people just hide, and, you know, kind of, like, it's easier not to participate, you know, the online platform	there's something that I think is lost in the virtual environment because a lot of people prefer to switch their cameras off.

5.3.1.2.3	R21M21	the whole point of being in an MBA program is that we are learning from each other and when we are learning from each other in person is done much much more effectively than learning from each other online and it's just because online there is a lot of space for people to hide you can just switch off your camera and mute your mic and we don't even know if you are there or not. Whereas in person it's a lot harder to hide its easier to understand who is physically present in class and their participation in class you can see actual faces they can't hide behind a camera that has been turned off.	just switch off your camera and mute your mic / whole point of being in an MBA program is that we are learning from each other / it's a lot harder to hide
5.3.1.2.4 Compartmentalising the home	R1F21	it's nice to have a break where all your study is becomes your everything and if you're studying in your bedroom then it all becomes the same thing, if you know what I mean. So the challenge is that it's nice to have a meant to work and from places of study and from home rather, you know it's nice to have different things broken up into different places	different things broken up
5.3.1.2.4	R4F21	My own attention. Being distracted of being at home, which is why you need you need your own space. You need a dedicated space to walk in and pretend like you're in class and you know not get caught up on whatever else is happening at home.	dedicated space to walk in and pretend like you're in class
5.3.1.2.4	R4F21	When I started off I didn't have a designated workspace where I could almost like go to campus from my house so then I created that in one of my spare bedrooms. So then that gave me that environment to you know be able to close the door and focus on like as if I was in class and not be disturbed by external things	designated workspace / close the door and focus / distracted by external things
5.3.1.2.4	R10M21	Then the other challenge that I had in my opinion was perhaps not having the right setup for long term or long sessions. So in terms of your chair your desk and screen and lighting. Yeah, I think those are our main challenges.	chair, desk and screen and lighting
5.3.1.2.4	R10M21	Okay so screen fatigue that was a critical issue. For me especially because I spend a lot of my time behind the screen during work so you would often transition into the MBA without any break which can be really tiring	screen fatigue
5.3.1.2.4	R13M21	certain purchases	certain purchases / comfortable learning space

5.3.1.2.4	R14F21	if I was going physically on campus at least your mind has this you know it gets this trigger that you're in a different environment you're in a learning environment. So it's sort of you're in a different zone and you're more I feel like you're more open to learning but doing it from home since you're I was working from home studying from home, there was no change and sort of just zoned out mentally	trigger that you're in a different environment / a differet zone / zoned out mentally
5.3.1.2.4	R14F21	Face to face, I still choose face to face. Maybe I'm a traditionalist but I just feel more comfortable being around people and I think there's just this ambiance you know being in a school environment and being with others physically who are also chasing the same goal. So, I'll still go for face to face.	ambiance of being in a school environment
5.3.1.2.4	R15M21	we had to sit in front of the PC for like three plus hours for every lecture after sitting the whole day from work it was It almost got to a point where like, you almost just they physically but you're not absorbing what's being taught especially if the lecture was not as engaging as they could be. So that was quite difficult.	three plus hours / sitting the whole day from work / not absorbing what's being taught
5.3.1.2.4	R18M21	You know after I set myself up with the proper home office, I had a great quality screen and keyboard and mouse comfortable chair I could move around my house wherever I felt like it to make myself comfortable. So that made it more conducive to learning in that regard in terms of environmental controls I suppose.	proper home office setup up / great quality screen and keyboard and mouse and comfortable chair
5.3.1.2.4	R20F21	level of exhaustion from just being on your screen all day. You know, and then you know having to concentrate for a few hours, few more hours in the day and finishing off at nine. I just found it to be very exhausting but I think, you know, obviously here it's not just the virtual sort of remote learning. It's also the fact that you are a part time student which has to eat and you've been working the whole day and now you know but It's kind of like a different energy	level of exhaustion from just being on your screen all day
5.3.1.3.1 Induction and orientation was lacking	R3F21	it's nice to have a break where all your study is becomes your everything and if you're studying in your bedroom then it all becomes the same thing, if you know what I mean. So the challenge is that it's nice to have a meant to work and from places of study and from home rather, you know it's nice to have different things broken up into different places	first interactions

5.3.1.3.1	R3F21	but I think if there is one element that I must choose must always be physical it must be then the introductory to the course perhaps the first session or first lesson or two, in terms of getting to just know who's in your class, who's the faculty, I think there's value in that first interaction.	introductory elements must always be physical
5.3.1.3.1	R7M21	we missed out on being online was the orientation as well I think that would have been really beneficial to have been in person and not online to get to know your fellow students	would have been really beneficial to have been in person and not online to get to know your fellow students
5.3.1.3.1	R12M21	when you start the MBA kind of program, you know, that's what you look forward to in that you you're able to interact and communicate with people face to face get to know each other better and so forth. So that was kind of we're kind of robbed of those advantages I suppose.	kind of robbed of those advantages / interact and communicate with people face to face, get to know each other better and so forth
5.3.1.3.1	R17M20	I think any elements from a face-to-face class room I think orientations. I think those are definitely important	orientations / definitely important
5.3.1.3.1	R19M21	I think the induction should be online and there should be provision for students who are who are not a who are not able to attend physically to attend online so they should be a flexible approach.	induction
5.3.1.3.2 Networking and social opportunities lost	R4F21	the way our university handled it where they would just like pair any random people in the breakout. So that was nice because you're not stuck talking to the people that you tend to sit with and you tend to always you know sit in the same place if you're a creature of habit. So that was nice because you really got to socialize and meet the whole class even if it is online. So that was nice. That randomness	stuck talking to the people that you tend to sit with / randomness
5.3.1.3.2	R13M21	So I think there's definitely a I wouldn't say prestige but I think there's an additional enhancement that you get from doing in the classroom meeting the people, interacting, forming relationships, I think that that aspect is real and it's part of what you pay for the MBA.	forming relationships / part of what you pay for

5.3.1.3.2	R13M21	the social aspect of it the interactive aspect of it the meeting people from different industries and peers within your industry and peers within your circle and something is missing from it when it's purely remote. I feel a hybrid to an extent misses that but I think if I if I was pushed to choose one or the other, I would probably choose in the in person in a classroom. I think also, there's the aspect of interaction with the, with the campus, I think you know part of the sort of experience of going to GIBS is the campus and being on campus. Meeting people and making use of the facilities	the interactive aspect of meeting people from different industries and peers within your industry and peers within your circle / social aspect / missing from it when it's purely remote
5.3.1.3.2	R19M21	Class. The quality of communication is much better and you get networking opportunities with other class members when it's physical. The syndicate learning is enhanced because when you're face to face you get to know your syndicate better than if it's online. When you're in the class you get closer attention from the lecture you can have one on one sessions when you're in class which is not feasible when you're online. So I would certainly choose the class.	communication and networking opportunities with other class members
5.3.1.3.3 Lack of learning from peers and observation	R3F21	I find that it's easier to even have to a follow up during tea break on maybe something, some concepts that you didn't grasp quite well, or even chat over coffee with a classmate on that concept and then you as you unpack it, the learning actually occurs in that space. So you know, learning, your pool of learning is more is bigger when you're in person than online	Full Quote
5.3.1.3.3	R3F21	The ability to learn from peers in many became more of learning from faculty rather than from peers as well because of that limited interaction	learning from faculty
5.3.1.3.3	R10M21	you can't easily chat to a buddy if you've missed a concept or you miss heard something or you're just a little bit unclear about something you know you can't sort of just get the input you will literally have to stop the class which is often a challenge so you end up just leaving it and that results in gaps in your knowledge or extra work at the end to try and figure out where the picture in the how the picture fits together.	you can't easily chat to a buddy if you've missed a concept or you miss heard something / gaps in your knowledge

5.3.1.3.3	R11M21	It's so much you know when you are an online environment there's no such thing as an informal chat. It has to be formal clear concise and then you ask your question whereas when you are in class are you able to ask clarifying questions even informally to either a colleague or the lecturer which allows you to better prepare for your examinations.	online environment there's no such thing as an informal chat
5.3.1.3.3	R16F21	You know and a lot of learning comes from observation as well or you know visual mentorship if I can put it that way. So, yeah, I think for me in this type of space, MBA level, definitely in person.	lot of learning comes from observation as well as, you know, visual mentorship
5.3.1.3.3	R16F21	very difficult to get a sense of, you know tone or the feeling in the room so to speak you know and obviously you only can engage through an online platform. So it's very difficult to sometimes get that engagement going obviously you know, cameras on cameras off, I generally had cameras off. So, yeah, our challenges were just, you know, in terms of, you know, there was no peer-to-peer learning if I could put it that way or learning by observation or just, you know, being in the presence of other people. Yeah, so kind of getting that momentum going in the online classroom environment is challenging.	peer-to-peer learning
5.3.1.3.3	R20F21	Whether it's tea break or lunch break when we are on site during tea breaks you chat to your classmates, you know, they are there next to you there's nothing else you can run and quickly, you know pour yourself a cup of tea, you know, like you will get home where everybody switches off themselves off in, you know, you go into something in the house. So when you are in the classroom, you have to chat to each other during tea times, you sit together, you know, it break time at lunchtime and so the conversations continue to flow sometimes from the class, to during break time, or else you bond better with your classmates, you know, your interpersonal relationships with your colleagues, your peers, you know, your classmates, I think we're enhanced that that bonding building your networks, I found it much easier in the classroom situation than online literally the moment the lecture finishes everybody is either switching off their cameras.	Full Quote

*Exhibit - 4: Research Question 2, quotes and phrases (discussed in section 5.3.2)*

<b>Section</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Phrases</b>
5.3.2.1.2 Avoiding Traffic	R4F21	the big thing was the logistics of it because I live in Pretoria and the University is in Joburg. So for me it would have added an additional like two hours to two and a half hours maybe three hours depending on traffic to my day which I felt I was able to save being at home so there was a major convenience factor that came in for me with being able to have campus online and you know take it for the come from the comfort of my own home. So that was a massive benefit	two and half hours
5.3.2.1.2	R10M21	Traffic was a huge saver. Especially if you live away from campus.	huge saver
5.3.2.1.2	R15M21	not having to travel to campus, you could use that time to really prep really well or rather than prep better and read up and just really get in tune today with a with a day's lecture	prepare for lectures better
5.3.2.1.2	R17M20	the efficiency in the sense of saving on travel time so you're a lot more efficient in that regard you're a lot more structured in terms of like you're using your time a lot better and I think that's for me by far the greatest benefit perhaps is the efficiency element to it	efficient / structured
5.3.2.1.2	R18M21	So instead of going to class in the morning when the evening and that travel time and you know, getting prepared physically to look appropriate for business level interactions that, you know all that time is saved	prepared physically to look appropriate for business level interactions
5.3.2.1.2	R20F21	not spending time in traffic to get to classes traveling back especially in the evenings. So the one thing for me that when we switched back to going to class, there was a thing that we finished classes after nine you must still drive back there's a safety issue in Joburg	safety issue in Joburg.
5.3.2.1.2 Flexibility	R3F21	ability to be able to connect at any hour of the day that was the benefit for me.	ability to be able to connect at any hour of the day
5.3.2.1.2	R7M21	So I could be anywhere in South Africa or the world for that matter and still be able to connect with my group. Like when I travelled now to Portugal I was still able to have syndicate meetings and you know chats about assignments and things even though I actually wasn't in Joburg. So there is a definite benefit to that just being able to work remotely from wherever you like	anywhere in South Africa or the world for that matter
5.3.2.1.2	R7M21	Yeah so I'd say the comfort of work in your own home your own computer your you know everything is convenient. Again, for lunch breaks or whatnot you don't have to do anything you just go to your own kitchen and do what you need to do. So yeah so the convenience aspect is a big benefit.	own home and their own computer



5.3.2.1.2	R13M21	Sometimes we find ourselves meeting for like 10 or 15 minutes to quickly discuss something which would have been more challenging and we had to meet and sort of make time and it was very easy to sort of be, I hate to use a corporate euphemism but it was it made us more agile from this perspective of being able to quickly meet to quickly discuss things to quickly get things out the way	for like 10 or 15 minutes to quickly discuss something
5.3.2.1.2	R17M20	I think benefit was the efficiency element and also obviously you didn't all necessarily need to get together on campus every single time to do group work and it forced us to leverage technology. So pre going into kind of hard lockdown we would literally all get into a syndicate room and start reviewing a document together and going page by page and asking for comments and then moving on to the next page that was an exceptionally tedious and drawn-out, drawn-out process. So that was the I think the major benefit that came from the whole thing is to say that we became a lot more efficient around group work and a lot better a from a cohesion perspective. One more point, I think scheduling was a lot easier as well because syndicate meetings and any group engagements could be fit into an individual schedule irrespective of where they were as opposed to the initial situation when they had to be at campus	get together on campus every single time
5.3.2.1.2	R19M21	you were able to complete other tasks like I was able to complete my job tasks and you could wake up a little bit late	complete other tasks
5.3.2.1.2	R21M21	learning from home gives that opportunity to be doing other things. Especially some calls that are brain dead so if you are sitting or you are folding clothes or you are washing dishes by hand or you are mopping the floor or something like that, an online class is definitely beneficial so you can sit and get all of that done at the same time and those things as I mentioned are brain dead activities so you don't need to be applying your mind to washing the dishes so you could be listening to a lecturer in class while doing that sort of exercise so the benefit is definitely the flexibility	do other things / some calls that are brain dead
5.3.2.2.1 Family Time	R3F21	that ability to still be able to go and say goodnight to my children, before they went to bed. I think during those tea breaks one could just quickly run up and say goodnight, it meant a lot to me. And just being here at home for my children, it meant mommy was home rather than mommy was at work [inaudible]. Yeah, I could tuck them in bed during our tea breaks online. I could tuck the kids in bed and still be that mom. So yeah, that was the one benefit for me being able to multitask.	Full Quote

5.3.2.2.1	R10M21	Timesaving definitely home relationships that helped substantially	home relationships
5.3.2.2.1	R11M21	you know remember, Dots telling us this is a divorce degree when we started off at the beginning of last year and I think just the opportunity to spend time with your family not being at campus 24/7 I think, you know coming out at tea time, having a cup of tea with your wife or kicking the ball very quickly with your five-year-old made a massive difference to my life specifically	divorce degree / have a cup of tea / kicking the ball / five-year-old
5.3.2.2.1	R20F21	So you could multitask you know because if you can switch off your camera you could be preparing dinner while listening, you know to the lecture but at the same time then your focus is divided, you know, your attention is kind of divided which is not a good thing. So, whilst there was a benefit to it, you know, in especially if you are a parent and, you know, kind of it gives the family a sense that you are in the home, they can reach you but at the same time I am sorry now am mixing something I should have mentioned and the challenges there is an element of thing is more easily distracted in the home environment although it can also be a benefit to an extent	the family a sense that you are in the home, they can reach you
5.3.2.2.2 Beneficial one-way interactions	R2M21	the sessions that they set up that are not particularly lectures but the research methodology sessions stuff like that, could definitely be done online, because that is a one way feed of information. You don't really need any interaction within those sessions, like they did with chapter one to four. It's, they need to show us what we need to do and I think items I get could definitely stay within the online space	one way feed of information
5.3.2.2.2	R4F21	So I like the technical stuff being online. The technical subjects.	technical stuff
5.3.2.2.2	R7M21	Yeah, so I definitely think that the workshops and sort of not core lectures could stay on online so like research workshops or things like that or writing workshops and those things those little add on's	sort of not core lectures
5.3.2.2.2	R7M21	I think having gone online there's definitely aspects that we will I'm sure GIBS and other universities have learned but you know as I said there's aspects which yes definitely could stay online like the workshops or administrative things or messages or addresses or things like that	like workshops and administrative things
5.3.2.2.2	R11M21	The courses like the ones that we're doing now like, you know, the writing skills and the qualitative research we did yesterday. I think when there's when there's 90% of talking from a lecturer, you know, on methodology with where things are when things are either black or white, it should remain online	Full Quote

5.3.2.2.2	R14F21	the pre-work that you have to do definitely that can still stay online and then also the exams I actually really appreciated being able to do the exams online	pre-work
5.3.2.2.2	R16F21	non-subject matter that's perhaps not so difficult should or could continue to exist in an online world	non-subject matter
5.3.2.2.2	R17M20	I think if it is going to be anything that's going to be kind of a stock standard very theoretical presentation driven then sometimes it might be beneficial to just have that online as opposed to in person but I still think by far the greater waiting to, to in person as opposed to online from a benefit perspective	kind of a stock standard very theoretical presentation driven
5.3.2.2.2	R18M21	I suppose these workshops that we're going through at the moment where they're not absolutely critical to your learning. Those are easy they're shorter you know, just two hours and its online. So you just connect, you listen you may interact a bit or not and you disconnect so those things from a practical point of view it's great if those kind of quicker things are online	just connect and listen, interact a bit or not
5.3.2.2.3 Unity in adversity	R16F21	again you know it was environment that you're not completely used to with a whole bunch of strangers. So, you know generally getting, you know, just my personality, you know, it's not getting to know people, strangers in person is difficult enough let alone doing that online but because, you know, everyone was in the same boat in terms of not knowing and, you know, feeling overwhelmed, and so forth I think that in itself kind of created some kind of common trauma, not trauma, but you know that means a common goal or common experience and actually united us and then we quickly you know just managed to suss each other out and just get the work done	difficult enough let alone doing that online / common trauma, not trauma, but... a common goal or experience / actually united
5.3.2.2.3	R18M21	everyone was kind of forced to be online quite quickly and had to be organised, I suppose by and large we did get it done	kind of forced to be online quite quickly and had to be organised

*Exhibit - 5: Research Question 3, quote and phrases (discussed in section 5.3.3)*

Section	Respondent	Quote	Phrases
5.3.3.1 Thoughts on Exams	R1F21	So it's nice being with people in the classroom, and have tea breaks and shared learning it's a rule from an exam point of view like I say those are enough sessions. You're not learning in a silo	tea breaks enabled shared learning / learning in a silo
5.3.3.1	R1F21	I'd love for them to make zoom recordings of each class, the quality of what they do to PGdip and we should have access to it at any point throughout the entire learning experience to GIBS because it creates a lot of rigor to our study groups to our learnings and I think it's punitive to actually take it away	a lot of rigour to... study groups
5.3.3.1	R3F21	I actually found that the recording of the sessions worked very well for me, because for every exam prep, I was able to go back to those recordings, pause wherever I wanted to pause and go at it at my own pace. So that's the one part I definitely miss about the online and having the sessions recorded	go back to those recordings pause wherever / own pace
5.3.3.1	R4F21	lectures allowed us to create our own templates create our own documents prior to the exam I was able to follow those instructions and so I felt I was able to take the exam in a much more structured approach because I had set up all my templates to handle certain questions	more structured approach / to handle certain questions
5.3.3.1	R4F21	I was not sure how that was going to work with regard to like you know, integrity because you know people can cheat and all sorts of kinds of things and get ghost writers and all of that stuff.	people can cheat and all sorts of things
5.3.3.1	R4F21	I could take snapshots and things like that while certain lectures are happening. I was able to make my own notes on my snapshots that I would be able to take. So that's you know I think in terms of note writing it was more convenient for me because I had everything right in front of me. So, I could add literally the lecture slides like snapshots of the slides into my notes or I could write on it. So that that was nice.	take snapshots and things like that
5.3.3.1	R4F21	lectures allowed us to create our own templates create our own documents prior to the exam I was able to follow those instructions and so I felt I was able to take the exam in a much more structured approach because I had set up all my templates to handle certain questions	documents prior to the exam
5.3.3.1	R10M21	The biggest challenge with reaching people from an administration point of view was during exams. I think if you're in person there's an invigilator there in there that can ask or refer. But online it was very disjointed often the invigilator had no clue about the exam or kind of just brushed off your questions whereas the examiner would have had better insight.	disjointed experience / no clue about the exam / reaching people from an administration point of view
5.3.3.1	R11M21	the fact that you could take screenshots of the presentation for your notes. Rather than wait for the slides after the lecture. So when you made your notes from a learning standpoint taking	screenshots of the notes / while the lecture is happening / wait

		screenshots of the notes before while the lecture is happening really assisted in in notetaking and preparation and learn.	for the slides after the lecture
5.3.3.1	R12M21	there were cases where some students exam submissions were not received on time or not received at all and you know that's obviously caused some confusion	exam submissions... not received on time or not received at all
5.3.3.1	R13M21	I was able to sort of make your own classroom in your own space it can be very beneficial. Again, you know, I had all my notes available to me all the time and all my textbooks available to me all the time there was never a time where I think well, you know I haven't got the right textbook with you I haven't got those notes I took last night with me	make your own classroom in your own space / notes available... all the time
5.3.3.1	R15M21	So it can reduce the anxiety of like, oh, I need to wake up on time, drive to campus and find a place and whatever, whatever. So you could actually prepare as late as you possibly could wake up as early as you could and have a quick breakfast and get ready for the exam. So cutting out that travel time for me made a big difference especially in the way that I study quite late in the night.	anxiety / wake up on time, drive to campus and find a place / travel time
5.3.3.1	R20F21	Can we please keep recordings, I think they are a valuable resource to go back to, you know, especially if you don't understand the concept you need to re listen to the explanation or the you know, the workings of a problem or whatever. It really helped a lot for me for the subjects that weren't my sort of you know strengths	a valuable resource to go back to
5.3.3.1	R20F21	above you don't form those relationships as organically as you would if you're in the classroom setting. So even around exam time it can be a lonely experience unless you make a concerted effort, you know, to you know, create a supporting supportive environment with your, either your syndicate, you know, colleagues or beyond your syndicate	relationships as organically as you would if you're in the classroom setting / lonely experience
5.3.3.2.1 Keep interactive course elements in person	R2M21	when you have a subject that is interactive. I think those are very important to have within lectures within lecture classes.	interactive
5.3.3.2.1	R4F21	So I like the technical stuff being online. The technical subjects.	technical stuff
5.3.3.2.1	R7M21	Yeah, so I definitely think that the workshops and sort of not core lectures could stay on online so like research workshops or things like that or writing workshops and those things those little add on's	sort of not core lectures
5.3.3.2.1	R11M21	When things are, you know, discussable we could we could converge our thinking where we could come up with different ideas those are the courses that should actually be face to face	discussable
5.3.3.2.1	R16F21	non-subject matter that's perhaps not so difficult should or could continue to exist in an online world	non-subject matter

5.3.3.2.1	R17M20	I think any class that requires sort of extensive debate or discussion I think it would be beneficial. I think it would be beneficial as well to have those to have those in class and then the second element is that the to do your first question around online, I think anything with extensive group work potentially, I mean, extensive group work also to say that possibly in a class setting to have that as opposed to break out rooms	require sort of extensive debate or discussion
5.3.3.2.2 Resilience	R5F21	I think the lesson that you can make it work regardless, it may take more work to do something online automated physically so you can get you can get the job done regardless. The second thing is one size doesn't fit all but you can still make it work so I think that with the option and the high level of online engagement a person's options are broader and when technical or logistical issues or acts of God happen you can a person can work around it. I think it's given I think it's given all humanity but also the educational fraternity additional scope to evolve to deliver to participate and altogether have a higher level of interaction. So I think it's a good thing.	humility / educational fraternity with additional scope to evolve to deliver to participate and altogether have a higher level of interaction / make it work regardless and get the job done regardless / technical or logistical or acts of God
5.3.3.2.2	R10M21	we are highly adaptable beings. Irrespective of age. I think the older we get the more stubborn we get but the adaptability is still there we just have to put our minds to it if we're forced into it unfortunately.	we are highly adaptable beings, irrespective of age
5.3.3.2.2	R15M21	it also forced you to, like become an online person right. So you have to quickly get comfortable with being online, be comfortable with like being savvy with your laptop and all these other fancy programs and whatnot. So that really did encourage yourself to like having to acquire a new skill set on an IT basis.	forced to become an online person / quickly get comfortable with being online, be comfortable with like being savvy with your laptop and all these other fancy programs
5.3.3.3 A call for recognition of changing times	R1F21	to have the option of being online if and when you need to like the idea to me of having 100% attendance is very punitive and ridiculous. People don't, people are not stationary like they used to, you know, those days of pick one country every day is ridiculous, right? People travel, they got work by demanding	punitive and ridiculous / pick one country every day is ridiculous as people travel / I hate to think if I ever want to pursue an MBA, I have to be in every class / very punitive and restrictive
5.3.3.3	R1F21	So it became a bit antagonistic where it was the university was keeping their rules and those who were still keen to do it online for whatever reason,	antagonistic

		even if they were isolating because they had COVID you have been punished	
5.3.3.3	R2M21	So yeah, I think definitely having the flexibility to log in online and obviously having certain requirements that you have to fulfil for logging in online. So perhaps everything within lectures and then if there is a problem, have the ability to log in online obviously what with the correct procedures to follow and I don't want to say good enough excuse by having a good enough excuse not to be in lectures. So if you do have proof that you are traveling for work abroad, you can still you can still log in from there and gain the knowledge that you're paying for	proof that you are travelling and correct procedures
5.3.3.3	R5F21	So you needed a lecturer that was aware of the fact that they had the online group and that specifically catered for that. So different lectures did this differently. So we had a variable experience with regards to that	lecturer that was aware of the fact that they had the online group and specifically catered for that
5.3.3.3	R6M21	I think where possible the option for people to choose how they want to be educated. So if you've got a lecture that wants to be in class so be it but give the student the opportunity to choose how they would like to participate	choose how they want to be educated
5.3.3.3	R8F21	Maybe if we saying we moving into the we are in the VUCA, the VUCA world things have changed. Holding on to traditional ways of doing things it becomes almost impossible because the times have changed. You want to take us back or you want to do things the way you have been doing. So let's allow the change and at the same time there are things to still retain in terms of engagement having people interaction connection when we are face to face. So I think it's important to balance the two.	Full quote / holding on to traditional ways of doing things / almost impossible
5.3.3.3	R15M21	So always giving an option to still be online and still follow the lecture I think is very necessary, but obviously don't make it like an every time thing. Obviously having a reasonable excuse why you can't be on campus and then be online for that day or session.	reasonable excuse why you can't be on campus
5.3.3.3	R18M21	It would be beneficial to have some sort of hybrid approach where you could people could catch up if they were traveling on an aeroplane and they just can't attend a class at night or personal matters on a weekend or something like that. So it would be nice to have an online option or at least a better way to catch up.	beneficial to have some sort of hybrid approach
5.3.3.3	R19M21	You should be given an opportunity to attend 50% offline on sorry online and there should be a 50% quota to attend physically so that you can benefit from the networking, the quality of information, the one-on-one sessions and their interactions with your syndicates.	Full Quote
5.3.3.3	R22M21	the weird part is we are always, you know, most of the time at school taught about the importance of agility however the same people that are teaching us about the importance of agility and where we	Full Quote

		see the future schools to look like the ones that are quite static in their thinking	
5.3.3.3	R22M21	I don't understand why I should not be able to communicate with the students online and the lecturers were just like, nope, I won't be entertaining this online nonsense. I suppose the weird part is we are always you know most of the time at school taught about the importance of agility however the same people that are teaching us about the importance of agility and where we see the future schools to look like the ones that are quite static in their thinking and I like that is not a classroom or not	intentionally disregard us online / just like, nope, I won't be entertaining this online nonsense



*Exhibit - 6: Additional Findings, phrases and quotes (discussed in section 5.3.4)*

<b>Section</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Phrases</b>
5.3.4.1 Thoughts on Administration	R1F21	you don't have their phone number you can't contact them a lack of an office phone that's annoying. So it's not so much about me and when they're accessible and then you really can rely on email that's a nuisance	nuisance
5.3.4.1	R4F21	there was no benefits with having them online because I felt like there was no accountability with them with us being online, whereas if they physically saw as they have to deal with us.	no accountability with them with us being online
5.3.4.1	R4F21	So I found that that was the most challenging part. I think if you can't physically go to an admin officer of the university and tell them your particular issue I feel like your message or your mail or communication to them just gets lost in translation and it gets forgotten about. So I think that the universities can do more in terms of admin to support students.	physically go to an admin offer of the University / message or your mail or communication... just gets lost in translation and gets forgotten about
5.3.4.1	R7M21	you could wait 2, 3 or 4 days for a reply on something that you know maybe it's an assignment that's due the next day and you can't afford to wait that long. So versus being in class where I felt that well not in class but on campus you can get an answer from faculty a lot quicker or from administration.	wait 2,3 or 4 days for a reply on something
5.3.4.1	R9F21	I think the response time wasn't as quick as it could have been, if we were physical. You know there were there were lots of follow ups to get to some sort of answer.	quick as it could have been if we were physical
5.3.4.1	R15M21	you needed to get hold of them and they would take forever and you almost needed to send second or third email sent to them before they react	send a second or third email
5.3.4.2.1 Lack of commitment with camera's off	R2M21	because if you are allowed to be at home and have your video off while you're in a group discussion there's a lot of people that actually do not engage very well within those circumstances	engage very well within those circumstances
5.3.4.2.1	R2M21	Sometimes if you do call upon them, then it's just quiet and you can obviously then pick up that, that they weren't listening or paying attention.	just quiet making it seem obvious that they weren't listening or paying attention
5.3.4.2.1	R3F21	I actually regressed and went the other way because of the online. I compare myself to my days in PDBA. I was very vocal in class, I had opinions for days and the online sort of gets you to this point of saying if I don't get picked on, I don't need to speak so what the hell so you sort of get yourself in that zone where you are not speaking much	Full Quote
5.3.4.2.1	R6M21	I also think that you can't really gauge people and how they feeling about certain topics unless their cameras on and a lot of people don't like to put the cameras on. So it's	reading the atmosphere / gauge people and how they are

		sometimes made reading the atmosphere but difficult.	feeling about certain topics
5.3.4.2.1	R8F21	Yeah, sometimes people were there but not there, it could be that we were just aware that we need to work with we as a team but not necessarily that you can be there, some would be driving, some would actually contribute to could not hear them. Yes, people when you're not together the level of participation is obviously different than when you're online.	sometimes people were there but not there
5.3.4.2.1	R10M21	I think, also not just being in the room by yourself having the cameras off all it was on it did help but I think you're less aware or more easily distracted than if you were in class and having people around you. I don't know if it's related to them physically being there or your being watched or is it a presence or I'm not sure but I'm less likely to be distracted if I'm in person	having the cameras off / less aware or more easily distracted / physically being there / watched with a presence
5.3.4.2.1	R10M21	Yes if camera's are off with group work on a group of seven or eight, you know two or three can be completely disengaged and unplugged and only wake up to like three minutes into the conversation and then it takes a conversation back to route one, to point one where we have made progress already. So it's frustrating on the group and frustrating for the leader. It really can slow progress in that regard and sometimes it even happens like a meeting later where somebody has woken up or seen a point. Whereas in person, you know we can easily call them out on being switched on or even I think they're less susceptible to drift or be distracted or be tempted to do something else while the meetings carrying on.	completely disengaged and unplugged / wake up / point one where / frustration
5.3.4.2.1	R17M21	The second challenge is the general challenge overall is around concentration and attention. So obviously people are because they think they are doing it remotely or doing it online and cameras are not off you see people multitasking or not really kind of setting up in a in a in a more formal environment to say listen, I'm at a desk or at a dining room table or whatever it is and doing this but I'll be lying on my bed busy cooking supper or whatever the case is. So you don't necessarily have as much concentration as one would hope, because people are trying to multitask in those times. So that's a big issue as well. So, so I think commitment and contribution is a by-product or, or lack of commitment, not necessarily lack of contributing commitment but a weaker commitment and contribution is perhaps a by-product of this.	weaker commitment and contribution

5.3.4.2.1	R20F21	there's something that I think is lost in the virtual environment especially because a lot of people prefer to switch their cameras off. So with that, I don't think the level of engagement is the same as being you know on site in class. You miss out on body language, you know you practically just relying on voice because for most people besides the lecturer you know would switch off their cameras even if they were talking. So, I think that that was the first thing the virtual platform the downside is that people prefer to keep their cameras off. Well, most people or a lot of people, and, and as a result, as I say, you know, I'll put the, you know, nonverbal, and even on communicate, I think people just hide, and, you know, kind of, like, it's easier not to participate, you know, the online platform	lost in the virtual environment
5.3.4.2.1	R21M21	I guess from an interpersonal perspective I felt someone sort of barrier between myself and the other class members because most people will switch off their cameras so it's a challenge to connect to them to understand them to read their body language so once a comment has been made its very difficult to understand how the comment is received by the rest of the class so it is for me personally a challenging experiences and it's an experience that it was good we went through but yeah it has quite a few of its drawbacks	sort of barrier
5.3.4.2.2 Administrative and scheduling benefits	R5F21	Well, I think it is inevitable that it will. I think that efficiencies of online is it just out weighs a whole lot of aspects. So I think shorter meetings smaller meetings syndicate work for example will remain online simply because of the efficiency. So I don't see that going away ever. I think that having enabling on online participation for lectures would be it's beneficial. It means that you can have more participants and it's easier for them to participate without interrupting the flow of the of the lecture. So yeah, I would like to see that continue. I think you get you get you get a much wider group input online.	shorter meetings, smaller meetings / more focused and a more outcomes-based group work / higher level of output
5.3.4.2.2	R7M21	buckling down and actually getting to the point online I think it's a lot easier to just debate things between each other versus being in person where I feel like you can get down to what you need to a lot faster than you can online	get down to what you need to a lot faster
5.3.4.2.2	R13M21	Sometimes we find ourselves meeting for like 10 or 15 minutes to quickly discuss something which would have been more challenging and we had to meet and sort of make time and it was very easy to sort of be, I hate to use a corporate euphemism but it was it made us more agile from this perspective of being able to quickly meet to quickly discuss things to quickly get things out the way	agile meetings for like 10 or 15 minutes to quickly discuss something

5.3.4.2.2	R15M21	I say that because working from home or studying from home, you know, you're often distracted or multitasking even though you don't intend to you will inevitably do something else	distracted without a dedicated venue / family, or work, or whatever
5.3.4.2.2	R16F21	I think again a lot more convenience in terms of people's lives and slotting into people's lives again not having to have that time to travel somewhere or whatever it is allowed us to actually connect more frequently at times it suited everybody. So that was quite convenient.	more frequent at times that suited everybody
5.3.4.2.2	R17M20	I think benefit was the efficiency element and also obviously you didn't all necessarily need to get together on campus every single time to do group work and it forced us to leverage technology. So pre going into kind of hard lockdown we would literally all get into a syndicate room and start reviewing a document together and going page by page and asking for comments and then moving on to the next page that was an exceptionally tedious and drawn-out, drawn-out process. So that was the I think the major benefit that came from the whole thing is to say that we became a lot more efficient around group work and a lot better a from a cohesion perspective. One more point, I think scheduling was a lot easier as well because syndicate meetings and any group engagements could be fit into an individual schedule irrespective of where they were as opposed to the initial situation when they had to be at campus	Scheduling was a lot easier /get together on campus every single time to do group work which was exceptionally tedious and drawn-out
5.3.4.2.2	R18M21	you could connect and work on it and then collaborate as opposed to being in a syndicate room at GIBS which can be can feel quite daunting late at night and you don't have things that make you feel comfortable, like, you know heat and warmth and coffee and food and water and all the things that's that people may require.	quite daunting late at night
5.3.4.2.2	R20F21	it's easier to coordinate meetings online late in the evenings. You don't have to travel, you know, to do your syndicate group meeting but that facility is still available anyway even though we're back online.	easier to coordinate
5.3.4.2.3 Conflict prevented by forming bonds in person	R1F21	they would be less syndicate problems if people were together more in person, there'd be more time for trust to be built more time for relationships to be built	more time for trust to be built, more time for relationships to be built
5.3.4.2.3	R13M21	Number one I think it is a bit more challenging especially because it makes getting to know the people you're working with longer more drawn-out process when you deal with them online, you know, to get to meet them sort of read their body language that type of thing and get to know them and get to understand their style of working and sort of almost become a cohesive unit, I think, probably the way you to describe an ideal syndicate	more challenging as it was a more drawn-out process

5.3.4.2.3	R14F21	So this was a little bit more difficult trying to do it remotely, because also, it is difficult to try and get your tribe, right, like your group of people that you can form a study group with, if you're studying remotely throughout. As I mentioned before it becomes difficult to know who is who what do they like, what are they like you know, can our personalities work together? That would have been easier for me to you know, come up with a study group that would help me go through the material and prepare for exams	temperaments and how they really are and how to connect with them / lot more reserved and sceptical / tribe
5.3.4.2.3	R14F21	So I feel like if we had taken some time to connect physically it would have been not easier but we would have maybe been able to, you know, deal with our issues better or just understand each other better. So I felt doing it remotely was a bit more complicated than if it had been done you know physically with the team with a group assignments and also trying to follow up on people with different timelines.	to connect physically / issues better or just understand each other better
5.3.4.2.3	R14F21	I feel at a human level there would have been much more empathy and caring and understanding if this had been done face to face and also if we had met prior and sort of connected prior and engaged with each other physically prior	human level with much more empathy and caring
5.3.4.2.3	R17M20	we had one or two situations especially in the early days we would like kind of snap at each other or there would be a fall off between sort of members of the group and we would immediately kind of address that or work through it and everyone would kind of necessarily get involved but basically help the process around it. I remember online, it's a case of someone will say something and someone will maybe respond or react or you know, something like that and everyone else just goes silent on the call. So oftentimes, there's this this kind of that no reaction. So you don't necessarily know where anyone stands. So I think resolution is easier in in person as well. Oh, okay.	silent on the call / snap at each other
5.3.4.2.3	R18M21	our first syndicate we really battled because we never met in person and, it caused, huge drama and frustration and it's very difficult now that I've experienced it, I can say it, it feels very difficult to meet people for the first time and build a strong connection strong enough that, you know there's big deliverables and you have to depend on each other and be able to deal with poor performance. Yeah, that's difficult when it's when it's online only.	really battled / it caused huge drama and frustration / a strong connection / depend on each other
5.3.4.2.3	R19M21	group work requires a level of rapport and there was a lot of misunderstanding because when you're online, you know sometimes you can read people's body language and people seem to behave differently online then personally people tend to be a little bit more friendly. Online you get that tendency of people, some people not being too friendly so it can lead to	Full Quote

		collapse of syndicates and harm of the quality of work produced by syndicates.	
5.3.4.2.3	R19M21	In person, in person actually prevented conflict. So, the so online created conflict because of misunderstandings created through the distance that you have with the person and then in person prevented conflicts. I didn't see any conflicts person.	actually prevented conflict / misunderstandings created through the distance
5.3.4.2.4 Conflict easier to deal with online	R2M21	I think that if there's a problem to be resolved, people might be a lot more verbal. If they are behind the screen, then what they would be in person	lot more verbal if they are behind a screen that what they would be in person
5.3.4.2.4	R3F21	I think that's one thing that virtual sort of does, it gives you a little extra boost in terms of your courage to speak things that you might not see in person, right? So I think it actually like now with our cameras off like this, I found people more easier to give feedback and like they could give feedback than when it would be person. So I think from a group perspective and giving each other feedback I think virtual works	easier to give feedback / little extra boost in terms of your courage to speak things that you might not see in person
5.3.4.2.4	R4F21	We had allowed for a pause period so we all kind of like took a breather and it helped because in that instance we were not then in the same place so we could cool down without seeing each other and then come back together and regroup	pause period / took a breather / could cool down without seeing each other then come back together and regroup
5.3.4.2.4	R5F21	it was better it was easier to do to deescalate a situation online but as people are there physically, physically present people seem to take offense and hang on to a point of view much harder. So for me, it was a better experience online.	deescalate a situation online
5.3.4.2.4	R6M21	there was conflict between two individuals and I think had it been in person it would have been far worse because people couldn't separate and go their own ways. You're in each other's face. I think it was better.	physically present / go their own ways
5.3.4.2.4	R9F21	For some reason conflict resolution which is better on online because I think it was we were able to just freely and openly speak as opposed to you know sometimes when you face to face you shy away from certain conversations.	freely and openly speak as opposed to instances where people shy away from certain conversations
5.3.4.2.4	R11M21	you'd get people who were introverts suddenly becoming extroverts and you get people who would just hide the hide behind no camera. You know and when people just didn't feel the reason to talk, they just didn't need to talk. It was very difficult to promote group cohesion collaboration and different ways of thinking because it was very easy for people to just become despondent and not add. I think in class you know it's much it's much easier to hold people to account in person	different perspective to syndicate meetings / introverts suddenly become a bit more dominating
5.3.4.2.4	R15M21	I think distance worked because it wasn't too confrontational and you addressed the issue	too confrontational

		and yeah, I think online was better to confront people's work ethics.	
5.3.4.2.4	R21M21	was a little bit of tension or conflict it was easier to fix that online and by the time, we met in person everything was sorted out so I would probably lean towards saying online.	everything was sorted out
5.3.4.2.5 Online conflict can be invasive and bullies are emboldened online	R7M21	Basically, it's almost like I can say you know when you driving in your car you have that barrier around you that now you think you're invincible and everyone can go jump off for a mountain versus if I talk to you face to face, I'm not going to behave the same way as if I was in my own little car thinking I'm a hero.	Full Quote
5.3.4.2.5	R8F21	you cannot see anyone and don't even have cameras on people share people speak up but when it's face to face you can actually see the expression and how the person body posture all those things, we tend to run away from dealing with conflict.	run away from dealing with conflict
5.3.4.2.5	R13M21	I can remember a particular time and one of the ladies in our syndicate on a final submission document and she is very detail orientated and she kept going back to a particular point in the document and I had to really restrain myself from losing my temper. I think the sort of remote aspect of that can because you can work these longer hours by being remote because that person is in your personal space there is that aspect to it and you almost can't get away from it. I had to be mature in that situation I am sure I was irritating as well. But restraining myself from losing my temper but that is the only time where it might have been an issue but I think you know my personal feeling is not to underestimate the intrusiveness of being remote or working longer hours and pushing yourself harder to work longer hours because you are not driving back and forth	intrusiveness of being remote