Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education

by

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Declaration

I, Tshepang Molemone, student number 16043503, hereby declare that this dissertation, "Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education," is my original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. A comprehensive list of references is provided for all sources cited or quoted in this research dissertation.

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August 2023

Dedication

A special dedication goes out to myself for completing one of the most significant accomplishments in my academic journey. This study is also dedicated to my loving family whose unwavering support and understanding during this challenging process meant everything to me, even if it required missing out on most family gatherings. Finally, I am grateful to my amazing partner who kept me going during moments of discouragement throughout this study.

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Abstract

This study explored lecturers' experiences with facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. The identified gap in the literature was the high demand for discussions about online facilitation and the limited studies on online facilitation. This provided an opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge by investigating lecturers' experiences with online facilitation in higher education. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that influence the facilitation of fully online programmes, as well as the challenges lecturers face when facilitating fully online modules and how these challenges can be addressed. To frame the study, the Multimodal model of online education was used as a theoretical lens. The study adopted a qualitative methodological approach and a case study research design. The sample included eight lecturers from one higher institution who facilitate online programmes, namely the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management. An online survey and a virtual interview were used to collect data. Data were analysed and manually coded using the thematic analysis method. The findings show that the elements of the framework influenced and challenged the facilitators' online facilitation experience, with support appearing as a new addition. Rich descriptions with proposed solutions to these challenges were interpreted and compared to existing literature. Furthermore, challenges related to the context of these programmes were identified, and solutions were found.

Key Terms:

Facilitation, facilitators, fully online, higher education, lecturers, online learning, multimodal model.

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Language editor

I hereby declare that I have edited the master's dissertation titled "Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education." My editing was limited to language and in-text referencing. It remains the prerogative and responsibility of the candidate to incorporate the recommended changes.

No view or judgement is expressed concerning the subject-specific contents of the document.

Dr F. Greyling
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List of Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DE	Distance Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
e-Learning	Electronic Learning
NCES	National Centre for Education Statistics
SDG4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UP	University of Pretoria
UCT	University of Cape Town
WITS	University of Witwatersrand
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
FPW	Free Public Wi-Fi
AP	Access Points

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explored the experiences of lecturers who facilitate fully online programmes in higher education and examined the factors that influence online facilitation, as well as the challenges facilitators encounter and how these challenges can be resolved. This study provides insights into facilitating fully online programmes for future facilitators and adds to the continuing conversation about e-Learning by looking into the experiences of these lecturers. This chapter includes background information relating to the topic, the problem statement, the purpose statement, research questions and a summary of the methodology. The terms lecturer and facilitator are used interchangeably in this study.

1.1 Background

The University of Pretoria introduced the directorate of Comprehensive Online Education Services (COES) in 2017 to roll out fully online programmes. Through COES, volunteers from all faculties were invited to participate in this study. A few faculties consented to participate in developing fully online programmes and their lecturers were trained for this new method of online facilitation and learning. COES academic and support staff, including learning designers, worked with the faculty and lecturers. Before the development of fully online programmes started, learning designers assisted with the accreditation of these programmes with University and National accreditation bodies (University of Pretoria, 2020). The result was the development of two fully online programmes: the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management offered by the faculty of Health Sciences and the faculty of Economics and Management Sciences respectively.

Despite contradictory findings in the literature about differences in developing face-to-face and fully online qualifications (Wang et al., 2019), the development of fully online qualifications at one higher education institution is different from what lecturers are accustomed to for face-to-face facilitation, and they need guidance. In fully online programmes all the interaction between facilitators and students takes place online and there are six registration opportunities, resulting in six intakes of students per year. Students can register for only one module at a time (University of Pretoria, 2020).

The two fully online qualifications mentioned above were offered for the first time in 2020 during the COVD-19 outbreak when institutions world-wide moved to online instruction, called emergency remote teaching, as can be seen in literature (Coman et al., 2020; Maatuk et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2020).

Ligita (2022) argues that while most higher education institutions used to deliver content based on a curriculum to students face-to-face, online learning has grown in popularity. Ligita also points out that before adopting fully online facilitation, lecturers used less than twenty five percent of e-Learning activities in their lecture halls. In addition to using e-Learning activities, Schell and Janicki (2013) advocate that a different pedagogy is required for online learning, where lecturers serve as facilitators and guide the dissemination of information, discussion questions are part of the delivery methods and a variety of e-Learning resources are utilised. Lecturers must use teaching techniques that increase student involvement in order to succeed in online facilitation (Gustafson & Gibbs, 2000). On the other hand, Budhai and Williams (2016) argue that the facilitating principles employed in face-to-face programmes must also be applied to online programmes in order to maintain the same standard of education.

For lecturers to effectively work with their students, they must receive support from their institutions (Reneau et al., 2018). By identifying the factors that influence online facilitation in higher education, this study sought to understand the experiences of lecturers in light of the background discussion provided above. This study also identified the challenges that lecturers encounter while facilitating fully online modules and how these challenges can be addressed.

1.2 Problem statement

A previous study shows that the number of students applying and enrolling in online courses at higher education institutions is rapidly growing, opening a need for online facilitation and learning (Adesina, 2020). Bair and Bair (2011) state that there is a vast amount of research regarding students' experiences in online learning, but there is much less about facilitators' experiences in online education, and this was also confirmed in studies by Budhai and Williams (2016) and Evans et al. (2019). To strengthen the argument made by Budhai and Williams (2016) and Evans et al. (2019),

Peimani and Kamalipour (2021) point out that there is a urgent need for discussions about the issues concerning online facilitation and learning. The identified lack of research and the need for discussions around facilitators' experiences in online education present an opportunity for this study to add to the body of knowledge and bridge these gaps that were identified in the research field.

1.3 Rationale

This study was motivated by the researcher's personal experience based on close observations made when working with the lecturers facilitating fully online programmes. The researcher realised that some first-time facilitators of fully online programmes were unfamiliar with technology and did not know how to use the tools available in the Learning Management System used by the university. This observation contributed to the researcher's interest in online facilitation and curiosity to understand the lecturers' experiences.

The researcher's curiosity was not satisfied due to a lack of research focusing on lecturers' experiences with facilitating online courses (Bair & Bair, 2011; Budhai & Williams, 2016; Coker, 2018). In addition, there is an urgent need for discussions about online facilitation challenges, as already mentioned (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). Based on what was not available in the literature, a decision was to set a fit for purpose criterion and it served for the need of focus research whose aim was based on the suggested topic.

1.4 Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of lecturers when facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. This was done by identifying the factors that influence facilitating fully online programmes. Additionally, this study explored the challenges lecturers encounter when facilitating fully online modules and how they addressed these challenges.

1.5 Research questions

To achieve the research purpose, the following primary and secondary questions were asked:

Primary question

What are lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education?

To address the primary question, the following secondary questions were asked:

Secondary questions

1. What are the factors that influence the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules?
2. What challenges do lecturers experience when facilitating fully online modules?
3. How do lecturers address these challenges when facilitating fully online modules?

1.6 Summary of the methodology

To explore lecturers' experiences with facilitating fully online programmes in higher education, the researcher was interested in the multiple realities and experiences of the participants in the study and, therefore, adopted a qualitative case study approach. To illustrate the alignment in the research design, Table 1 summarises the relationship between the research questions, data collection instruments and study sample. A detailed description of the research design is provided in Chapter 3.

Table 1

Alignment of research design

Research question	Instrument	Sample
SRQ1 (Secondary Research Question 1)	Online interview Online survey	5 8
SRQ2 (Secondary Research Question 2)	Online interview	5
SRQ3 (Secondary Research Question 3)	Online interview	5

The sample is a subset of online facilitators taken at one higher education institution who facilitate fully online programmes in the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management.

1.7 Data management

In this study, data were collected and analysed deductively (Azungah, 2018) to find, analyse and present patterns in the data. Thematic analysis was used as a method of data analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Transcribing and coding, as suggested by Nieuwenhuis (2016), were carried out in accordance with the elements of the framework in the Multimodal Model for online education (Picciano, 2021). The quality of this study was ensured at all times by considering trustworthiness when collecting and interpreting data. A full description of data management is provided in Chapter 3.

1.8 Ethics

This study aimed at maintaining confidentiality and transparency when data was collected. Ethical clearance (EDU125/120 MOODLEY 21-02) for this study was granted. All reports resulting from this study (for example, this dissertation, articles and conference presentations) will maintain the anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms. Ethical considerations are further unpacked in Chapter 3.

1.9 Significance

This study aims to fill a research gap regarding lecturers' experiences when facilitating online programmes in higher education and adds to the ongoing discussions and debates about the topics. The importance of this study lies in its contribution to addressing the paucity of research on online facilitation.

1.10 Summary

In this chapter, the background of the study was discussed. The chapter highlighted the dire need for facilitators to adapt to new teaching strategies to be successful in facilitating fully online programmes, especially when the university embarked on a new, comprehensive online project. This study explored the experiences of facilitators facilitating fully online modules, namely the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management. It also focused on the factors

that contribute to online facilitation, the challenges lecturers encounter and possible solutions for these problems.

Chapter 2 reviews literature around online learning, online facilitation and the factors that influence online facilitation. It also provides an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework, namely the Multimodal Model for online education, developed by Picciano (2021), as it links with this study. Chapter 3 discusses the interpretivism paradigm and qualitative case study research design employed in the research. The chapter also covers the sampling process and selected data collection instruments and concludes with quality assurance and ethical considerations. The data findings and analysis are presented in Chapter 4. The similarities and differences between the existing literature and the findings of this study are shown as guided by the theoretical framework. Finally, reflective thoughts and the conclusion of this study are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The popularity of studying online is growing exponentially, enabling students to engage and access education wherever they are located without having to depart from their homes (Tibingana-Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020). Similarly, in South Africa, online learning has evolved from distance, to blended education and now to administering fully online courses (Malan, 2020). This growth in the uptake of online learning, in higher education institution resulted in a demand for more online facilitation (Adesina, 2020).

While the background and purpose of the study are covered in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 explores lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education further by providing an overview of previously published studies and research findings. The chapter delves into the online learning landscape and online facilitation. It also unpacks the framework known as the Multimodal Model for online education (Picciano, 2021), which served as a theoretical foundation in this study.

2.2 Variations of online learning

To provide a background to the long and rich history of the forerunners of online learning, the history of Distance Education and Open and Distance Learning is discussed. A brief discussion of online learning variations, such as blended learning and hybrid learning, follows the historical overview. It is important to take note that the prime focus of the study is fully online programmes referred to as e-Learning in this study. e-Learning is also known as online education or online learning.

2.2.1 The history of Distance Education and Open and Distance Learning

According to Casey (2008), Distance Education made its appearance in the 1700s and 1800s. Garrison and Shale (1987, p. 11) define distance education as "a form of learning that implies that the majority of educational communication between the facilitator and student(s) occurs non-contiguously." It must involve two-way communication between the facilitator and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process and it uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. Simonson and Schlosser (2009, p. 1) define distance

education as “institution-based, formal education, where the learning group is separated and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect students, resources, and instructors.” From the above definitions, it is evident that distance education utilises technology as a form of communication and the student and facilitator need not physically meet for teaching and learning to occur. Bozkurt (2019) states that the history of distance education can be categorised into three time periods: correspondence, visual-auditory and computer-based.

Following the computer-based stage, which denoted the start of digital knowledge in society, the “terms open education, open and distance learning and distance education are often used interchangeably” (Bozkurt, 2019, p. 209). Bates (2005, p. 5) states that the above-mentioned terms signify differences and define open education as “primarily a goal, or an educational policy”. The term “Open” refers to the opportunity provided for teaching and learning to occur irrespective of the venue or economic or social circumstances (Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006). Bates also asserts that anyone should be granted access to open education, and it should be versatile and adaptable.

In the past, the term “Distance” was associated with the psychological/social element rather than the actual physical distance as it is now (Bates, 2005; Bozkurt, 2019). Keegan (1996), further indicates that the term “Distance” refers to the separation in terms of place and time between the student and the facilitator. Bates (2005, p. 5) referred to distance education as “less philosophical and more a method of education where students can study in their own time, at the place of their choice (home, work or learning centre), and without face-to-face contact with a teacher”.

Although technology plays a role in distance education, Bozkurt (2019) points out that no matter how much distance education relies on technology, is it also essential to remember that technology is just a medium to convey learning content and not the main objective of the existence of open education. According to Bozkurt, the fundamental reason for the existence of distance education is to remove certain barriers relating to learning. As Information and Communication Technology (ICT) continued to permeate the education sector, new forms of instruction emerged, such as e-Learning, blended learning and mobile learning, with more interactive content to be presented to students (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013). Following the rapid

advancements in the development of ICT and their accessibility to everybody, online learning and e-Learning have evolved into a form of distance learning.

2.2.2 Electronic learning

e-Learning is referred to as a form of facilitation and studying that takes place over the internet, either asynchronously or synchronously, and it can also be called online learning or online education and encompasses all forms of education that do not take place face-to-face (Anderson, 2016; Clark & Mayer, 2016; Mpungose, 2020). Daniel (2016a) states that e-Learning is a technology enhanced version of distance education. According to Li and Masters (2009), the "e" should encompass more than just "electronic", it should also include concepts like "evolving", "enhanced", "everywhere", "every time" and "everybody". Along with the advancement of technology, e-Learning is expanding significantly (Abou El-Seoud et al., 2014). Rodrigues et al. (2019, p. 88) state that concepts such as e-Learning, distance education and web-based education all share a common characteristic in that "they are a form of instruction that occurs between a student and an instructor and are held at different times and/or places using various materials." In the e-Learning environment the course content is made accessible through the use of technological hardware devices, such as computers, mobile devices and laptops, and software systems such as Learning Management Systems and software applications (Khoza & Biyela, 2020). Abou El-Seoud et al. (2014) also point out that the growth in e-Learning gave rise to changes in the higher education system and students can now exchange information easily. They further state that the success of e-Learning in higher education can be evaluated by the effectiveness of delivery methods. To achieve success in higher education, facilitators must accept, incorporate and adapt technological advancements provided by e-Learning (Abou El-Seoud et al., 2014). As already mentioned above, e-Learning can take two forms: asynchronous and synchronous.

Asynchronous e-Learning programmes do not occur in real-time, students are more independent and they aim to accomplish the course within a chosen time-frame (Dung, 2020). Dung points out that the facilitator and student engage through online learning communication channels, such as blogs, emails and discussion boards, and there are no scheduled class meetings. Brierton et al. (2016) point out that engaging

through channels such as discussion boards allow students to communicate their ideas and explore a topic comprehensively. They highlight the added advantage that students do not feel compelled to answer immediately when questions or remarks are made; they have time to think about their response. Pang and Jen (2018) state that asynchronous programmes offer the advantage of flexibility as students are not required to be online at the same time and are able to work on their studies at different times. Students can undertake their studies in asynchronous courses anywhere and anytime (Chaeruman & Maudiarti, 2018). Dung contends that asynchronous courses are adaptable, effective and suitable for students with time constraints or busy schedules. In a recent study, challenges such as the absence of face-to-face engagement and delayed feedback from facilitators were identified as obstacles in asynchronous online programmes (Öztürk, 2021).

In synchronous online programmes, learning activities and interactions between the facilitator and the student occur in real time (Lin & Gao, 2020) even though they are not physically in the same space. Students receive guidance from the facilitator in online classrooms and engage through texts, audio and video chats (Dung, 2020). Engaging through texts, audio and video allows the facilitator to provide constructive feedback to students both to the entire class and individually (Moorhouse & Wong, 2022). Salmon (2003) states that some of the benefits of synchronous online programmes are that there is constant communication and immediate attention between students and the facilitator and a real classroom learning experience is maintained. Moorhouse and Wong (2022) found that some of the applications used by facilitators in synchronous online courses include Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft Teams and Webex. They point out that the above-mentioned applications include features such as “raise hand” and “share screen”, which are utilised to administer real-time interaction between the facilitator and student.

2.2.3 Blended and hybrid learning

e-Learning also plays a role in hybrid and blended learning. Abdelrahman and Irby (2016) state that hybrid and blended learning are often used interchangeably. However, Singh et al. (2021) argue that hybrid and blended cannot be used interchangeably as they differ. They also point out that online resources are used in hybrid programmes, to fill in for face-to-face class meetings, and interactions can

either be synchronous or asynchronous. Abdelrahman and Irby are in agreement that hybrid learning offers adaptability and access to resources, such as facilitators and course.

Valiathan (2002) describes blended learning as a method that incorporates a mix of event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live web-based training and self-paced training. Rovai and Jordan (2004, p. 1) define blended learning "as a hybrid of classroom and online learning that includes some of the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact." A recent study referred to blended learning as a form of education that contains face-to-face meetings and also incorporates online resources (Singh et al., 2021). According to Tayebinik and Puteh (2013), blended learning was introduced as an attempt to address some of the limitations of e-Learning and fully online education, for example, the absence of face-to-face interaction. Azizan (2010) points out that both e-Learning and face-to-face education have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, blending the qualities of the above-mentioned forms of education as a way of developing another technique can be beneficial, thus, the creation of blended learning.

According to Bates (2015), blended learning encompasses a wide range of approaches that can be used as teaching tools in the classroom, with examples such as PowerPoint slides and clickers. Additionally, it can play a role in providing administrative support through the utilisation of a Learning Management System. Blended learning opens up opportunities for students to have access to learning material after the official class, thus providing additional learning time and access to more classroom resources, and it encourages interactions between students (Daniel, 2016a). Blended learning provides an active learning environment with flexible resource usage and affords facilitators more time to spend with students in small groups or individually (Oh & Park, 2009). Singh et al. (2021) point out that, in blended learning, online resources are not used to replace face-to-face class time; rather, they are used to support teaching and expand on the concepts discussed in the classroom.

It is evident that various facilitation methods are available where e-Learning plays a role. However, it is also essential to understand the motivation behind the adoption of e-Learning in higher education institutions. The following section outlines the current drivers of online education in higher education institutions.

2.3 Drivers of online education at higher education institutions

The demands for online learning from students and institutional pressure to increase their offerings form part of the drivers for online learning at higher education institutions (McGee et al., 2017). As student numbers rise, there is a growing demand for online programmes in higher education to make education more easily attainable (Ali, 2020). Therefore, the rate of online programme development at higher education level is rapidly growing (Budhai & Williams, 2016).

In a 2008 study, the National Centre for Education Statistics identified some of the major drivers that influence the decisions of higher education to adopt online learning. These include the need to respond to students' requests regarding the freedom and ability to adjust their schedules, increase access to education, offer a wider variety of courses and increase the rate of registrations (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). Moore and Kearsley (2011) highlight additional drivers such as the demand to offer programmes that improve the skills of working individuals and provide them with the opportunity to study at lower costs while pursuing their careers. Since 2011, numerous studies have pointed out that students registering for online programmes include working adults and adults with family responsibilities, such as caring for young children or elderly parents (Hewson, 2018; Michael, 2012; O'Shea et al., 2015; Ragusa & Crampton, 2018; Signor & Moore, 2014). Students living with disabilities also reported that online education gives them more control over their studies because of the benefits of self-paced learning and the absence of geographical restrictions, which enable them to manage their impairments (Kotera et al., 2019).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) can also be considered as one of the drivers for online education at higher education institutions, owing to its goal of achieving education that is of fair quality and all-inclusive (Silo & Ketlhoilwe, 2020).

The SDG4 Education 2030 framework intends to assure quality education as well as encourage lifelong learning opportunities for everyone (Mundial & UNICEF, 2016). The majority of countries committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030 (Ghanem, 2020). Ghanem regards online education as one of the avenues that have the potential to contribute to sustainability goals, given the current shift to online learning.

A more recent factor that compelled institutions, globally, to shift to e-Learning was the COVID-19 pandemic (Maatuk et al., 2022). The authors also point out that traditional facilitation and learning methods were replaced by e-Learning when social distancing was required to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Alsuelmi (2021) states that the COVID-19 pandemic pushed institutions to switch to online learning, opening up a need to improve the quality of using technology for facilitation and learning. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions continue to use online learning (Leo et al., 2021).

One of the drivers of online learning, which was also highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, is flexibility. Flexibility is also one of the main reasons why online education exists (Daniel, 2016b). Veletsianos et al. (2021) state that flexibility eliminates the hurdles relating to pace, time and place in online learning. Ghanem (2020) points out that flexibility allows for the accommodation of student diversity and enhances lifelong learning. Daniel (2016b) further states that, from an online facilitator's point of view, flexibility might be viewed as increasing the scope of pedagogical methods provided to students in courses and allowing various creative methods of evaluating students' tasks. However, while flexibility may be viewed as an advantage, practically it can be affected by the rigid regulations and rules of the universities (Stone et al., 2019). For example, research conducted by Moore and Greenland (2017) reveals that incomplete assignments resulting from unforeseen work obligations and ambiguous procedures regarding the granting of extensions are the primary causes of dropout in online programmes.

2.4 Online education landscape

Online education is expanding rapidly, as was already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. As a result, institutions all over the world had to adapt their facilitation strategies, using tools such as video conferencing and discussion boards in their online classrooms (Palvia et al., 2018). The communication between facilitators and students while physically removed from one another in online lessons, forms part of the reasons why online learning is becoming more and more crucial for education (Ferri et al., 2020). In addition, with online education, students have the option to study at their own pace and at a time that suits them (Martin & Bolliger, 2022). Thus, the demand for e-Learning is also driven by its flexibility and ease of access (Muthuprasad

et al., 2021). According to Palvia et al, online education is now more practical from a technical, financial and operational standpoint as information and communication technologies continue to advance. They contend that universities, worldwide, are prompted to offer online programmes due to a variety of factors, including financial considerations and benefits (such as needing fewer classrooms, offices and libraries), an increase in non-traditional students who are employed full-time and the development of technology that makes it progressively easier to implement online learning. The following section focuses on some developed and developing countries that offer online qualifications, as well as the challenges they face.

While the number of students enrolled in online programmes rises each year in developed countries, such as the United States of America (USA), the number of enrolments in face-to-face courses continues to drop (Seaman et al., 2018). Lederman (2018) reported that there were more than six million students in the United States of America (USA) who took at least one online course in 2016 and that the number kept rising.

Since e-Learning has the potential to expand access and improve the quality of education, the government of India is encouraging online education (Jindal & Chahal, 2018). As an example, Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), an initiative launched by the government of India, aims to fulfill the three main goals of education policy, namely equity, access and quality. According to KPMG India and Google, developing countries such as India are better positioned to forgo the outdated learning models that were previously used in other nations and can take advantage of the latest innovations in online education (Bansal, 2017). Jindal and Chahal contend that the expansion of online learning in India is being fueled by the widespread use of the internet, the simplicity of taking online courses while working and closing the gap between academic standards and expectations.

The growth of online education is accompanied by a number of challenges for developing countries, such as Indonesia and Pakistan, which include poor infrastructure, lack of access and inadequate facilitator preparation and professional development (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Owen et al., 2020). According to Wu (2020), the unanticipated shift to online learning became a test of organisational agility, with many universities concentrating more on the transfer of educational content to the digital

space than on online facilitation and delivery techniques. Furthermore, Adnan and Anwar (2020) point out that another significant challenge with online learning, internationally, is the lack of appropriate interaction with facilitators.

Two national departments oversee the South African education system: the Department of Basic Education, which is responsible for primary and secondary schools, and the Department of Higher Education and Training, which is responsible for vocational training and tertiary studies (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). The 2013 White Paper on Post-School Education and Training indicated that "as the digital technology, and therefore e-learning, has become more accessible in South Africa, it becomes necessary to incorporate this dimension into conceptualising possible modes of provision" (South Africa & Training, 2014, p. 49). In 2017, the University of Johannesburg, a South African university, started offering various fully online programmes, such as the Bachelor's degree in International Accounting that prepares students to become proficient accountants (Malan, 2020). Shortly after, other universities, such as the University of Cape Town (Czerniewicz & Haupt, 2018), University of Witwatersrand (Naidoo & Israel, 2021) and the University of Pretoria (University of Pretoria, 2020), also started offering fully online qualifications. It is evident that various institutions in South Africa are now adopting online education.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased interest in online education in South Africa as most institutions were forced to move to online education (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). Mhlanga and Moloi, as well as Chaka (2020), found that Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) tools for virtual learning, including video conferencing and social media, were utilised from basic to higher education institutions as a way to assist with delivering online education. They, therefore, contend that the utilisation of 4IR tools has proven the ability of South African higher education institutions to implement online learning systems, thus, assiting in reducing the challenge of limited access to education. Mhlanga and Moloi (2020) further argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about an inspiring element towards the digital transformation in the education system.

However, factors such as poor literacy and the digital divide hinder the success of online education in South Africa. Queiros and de Villiers (2016) argue that South African students from underprivileged households are affected by substandard schooling conditions and socio-economic factors, such as limited access to electricity

and the internet. They also caution that limited computer access and usage, often leading to poor literacy, result in the failure to reap the full benefits of online education (Mpungose, 2020; Queiros & de Villiers, 2016). The need to shift from face-to-face to online education raised concerns regarding the viability of online education, given the level of inequalities that exist in South Africa's higher education landscape (Mpungose, 2020). However, Mzangwa (2019) states that significant efforts, such as policy amendments, were introduced to try and mitigate the level of inequality in higher education institutions in South Africa.

The digital divide is one of the factors hindering the success of online education and can be defined as the gap between those who have and those who do not have access to the internet and technological devices (Van Dijk, 2006). The digital divide can be caused by factors such as unequal access to the internet and technological devices, as well as the quality of internet access (Pather & Booi, 2020). Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2019) argue that access to the internet and technological devices is better in developed countries across the world, such as the United States and Europe, as well as some parts of Africa. Pather and Booi (2020), supported by Rodrigues et al. (2019), state that the digital divide in South Africa is significant, especially in rural areas.

Although the digital divide is still an issue in South Africa, various post-apartheid programmes have been implemented in which universities are providing some of their students with free laptops and access to computers, as well as Wi-Fi inside the institutions and residences. One such programme is the provincial Free Public Wi-Fi project that was introduced in various provinces across the country, such as the Western Cape, Gauteng and Kwazulu Natal (Geerdts et al., 2016). According to Geerdts et al., Wi-fi Access Points are typically placed at schools, clinics and libraries to facilitate access to information and, most importantly, to bridge the digital divide. Another programme that was implemented by the government in partnership with companies such as Google and Facebook and network providers, such as Vodacom, Cell C and MTN, was the provision of data-free or zero-rated internet services to students in order to provide them with free access to the university Learning Management System during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Romanosky & Chetty, 2018). Carew (2015) states that the aim of offering data-free internet services is to enhance the lives of the low income earners by enabling them

to access the internet free of charge. Having access to online material increases the opportunities for lecturers to continue to teach and facilitate learning online (Dhawan, 2020).

2.5 Online facilitation in fully online programmes

Since the need for online studying in higher education institutions is growing, the demand for online facilitation and learning is also increasing (Adesina, 2020). While online facilitation refers to teaching using technology or online channels, as well as controlling learning materials (Bello, 2021), it also requires changes to instructional methods (Simamora et al., 2020). The authors argue that the change in instructional methods is fundamental for institutions to ensure that facilitators have proper abilities and capabilities, in not only the conveyance of content, but also the development and design. Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2020), argue that facilitating online programmes does not merely focus on presenting content to students; it is also an innovative approach to teaching. However, in order to consider online facilitation innovative, facilitators should receive sufficient support.

Sharoff (2019), point out that facilitating online programmes that maintain students' engagement requires facilitators to foster strategies that encourage involvement and build a sense of belonging. Maintaining an interactive classroom and building a sense of belonging can be achieved through the use of tools such as collaborative discussions and peer activities which are regarded as significant in online learning (Chadha, 2017). Online facilitation requires steering the pedagogical environment towards more involvement, exchanging and sharing of ideas, group activities and debates (Adesina, 2020). Thus, the role of the facilitator shifts from being the teacher and transmitter of knowledge to being more of an overseer in an environment where independence and collaboration are encouraged (Bello, 2021). According to Albrahim (2020, p. 9), some of the skills and competencies required for successful online facilitation include "pedagogical skills, content skills, design skills, technological skills, management skills, institutional skills and social and communication skills".

2.6 Factors influencing online facilitation

Various factors influence online facilitation. This section explores some of the identified factors that influence online facilitation.

2.6.1 Online facilitators' readiness

Adnan (2018) refers to an online facilitator's readiness as the level of preparedness regarding the design, facilitation and delivery of the content. The techniques for preparing facilitators to facilitate online courses vary from those used in face-to-face delivery modes (Baran & Correia, 2014; Baran et al., 2013). Adnan points out that it is crucial to be aware of the level of the facilitators' readiness in order to assess the progress and success of the online programme. Howard et al. (2021) mention the importance of determining the readiness of both the facilitator and the institution and not treating the two as one, in order to effectively analyse each element's level of readiness. Phan and Dang (2017) state that the progression from face-to-face to online education requires well-planned groundwork to be done with facilitators, faculty members, staff and students to enable them to adjust to new ways of facilitating and learning. Lecturer self-efficacy in online facilitation is also considered to be one of the factors that can be used to determine the readiness of facilitators (Howard et al., 2021). Some of the factors that might assist in determining readiness are technical skills level, online facilitation experience, time management and commitment (Ventayen, 2018).

2.6.2 Class size

The increase in online education gave rise to the recent interest in discussions about class sizes (Lowenthal et al., 2019). A class is defined as "any class where the numbers of students pose both perceived and real challenges in the delivery of quality and equal learning opportunities to all students" (Maringe & Sing, 2014, p. 763). Sorensen (2014) states that an advantage for any higher education institution that administers online courses is not having to allocate physical space for actual teaching and learning. Therefore, hindrances and restrictions related to the number of study tables that can be fitted into an actual lecture hall are not experienced in online classrooms.

Studies that investigated the relationship between the facilitator's performance and class size in an online environment showed that the class size may possibly affect the instructor's capability to utilise their skills, experience, knowledge on the topic and ability to provide constructive feedback, which can lead to a non-favourable learning environment (De Pryck & DePryck, 2023). However, Bettinger et al. (2017) found that

the number of students in an online classroom has no bearing on their grades, engagement or determination. Lowenthal et al. (2019) indicate the importance of planning ahead, which might assist in reducing the challenges associated with facilitating learning in large online classes.

2.6.3 Utilising technology for facilitation

Conrad (2004), in one of his studies, explored the perceptions of first-time online facilitators by interviewing five instructors that facilitated an online programme in higher education. The facilitators indicated that technology provided them with convenience and freedom to choose when to interact and engage with students. Using technology when facilitating online learning provides an opportunity to use flexible learning materials (Pekkarinen & Hirsto, 2016). Sharoff (2019) states that higher education institutions need to grow their educational systems to incorporate technology as a tool and not as a pedagogical technique. Bharuthram and Kies (2013) argue that before using a technological medium for facilitation, the issues regarding the tool must be known and understood. For example, for facilitators and students to be able to participate in synchronous and asynchronous sessions, technology must be accessible and dependable, and sufficient training and support must be available (Pierce-Friedman & Wellner, 2020). Moreover, in one of the studies that explored facilitators' experiences with the design and use of Learning Management Systems, the researchers found that the use of technology in an online environment, especially in developing countries with unequal distribution of resources, is still one of the factors hindering the success of online education (Sarfo & Yidana, 2016).

In a recent study, it was argued that learning and facilitation methods have been modified to include activities such as discussions and peer work that use the functionalities of technology to facilitate engagement (Tsyrulnyk et al., 2021). During COVID-19, examples of these adaptations of lesson plans to include technology were evident, as there was a rapid shift from face-to-face to online facilitation and learning (Trust & Whalen, 2021).

2.6.4 Course design and delivery

Crews and Wilkinson (2015), point out that the quality of course design influences the standard of facilitation in online programmes. Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2020)

state that when teaching tools and resources diversify, online pedagogy and course design should be re-adjusted and the changes must be applied, respectively. Martin et al. (2019) state that course design covers the practices, systems and attributes of online courses. They argue that using quality principles and standards aids in producing an online educational environment that is carefully built, planned and aligned with learning goals, with course materials that have the potential of leading to the achievement of set goals. Sharoff (2019) states that for students to achieve the course goals and results, the design team and facilitators should coordinate and organise the objectives and lay out clear cutoff times, activities and expectations. In a study done on the quality attributes of online course design, it was argued that the design team should comprise of a facilitator, learning designer, librarian, and content expert (Lenert & Janes, 2017). Ginda et al. (2019), point out that online students often feel empowered when their courses align with their careers, as it adds to personal development and improves their understanding, knowledge and skills. Adnan (2018) states that student satisfaction is one of the determining factors in measuring the success and standard of online programmes.

2.6.5 Professional development

Professional development is a fundamental part of online facilitation (Adnan, 2018). Baran and Correia (2014) point out that professional development is a crucial factor in helping facilitators adapt to new ways of facilitating, assess their expected roles and attain the skills needed in online facilitation. While professional development is voluntary, it is essential to facilitators' continuous growth (Parsons et al., 2019). Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2020) state that the kind of support needed in terms of professional development varies from one facilitator to the next. In a study conducted by Parsons et al. (2019), it was found that the benefit of participating in online professional development courses enables facilitators to work at their own pace, access the content at any time and apply what they have learned in their programmes. Other aspects that may have to be considered in facilitator development and support include determining the level of facilitators' technology literacy and the types of activities that can be used in online learning systems (Howard et al., 2021). Fischer et al. (2018), mention that professional development is essential for online facilitators' continuing growth.

2.6.6 Online facilitator presence

In online education, the depth of learning is determined by the presence of the facilitator (Howard et al., 2021). Facilitator presence is defined as "specific actions and behaviors taken by the instructor that project himself or herself as a real person" (Richardson et al., 2015, 259). Facilitator presence is enhanced when the instructor establishes his or her individual identity by recognising and carrying out the relevant online facilitating roles (Martin et al., 2018). Facilitator presence has the potential to affect student satisfaction, motivation, retention and cognition (Baker, 2010; Brinkerhoff & Koroghlanian, 2007). The load is heavier on the shoulders of facilitators because not only are they required to specialise in the content they deliver, they are also expected to be technology literate in order to be able to facilitate in an online environment (Phan & Dang, 2017). Muir et al. (2019) point out that the presence of an online facilitator is crucial in building and maintaining collaboration and connectedness between students and the instructor. Ragusa and Crampton (2018), in their study, found that the quality of the feedback received from the facilitator was regarded by students as the most appreciated communication about their learning. According to Gurley (2018), design, facilitation and structuring of courses are the determinants of facilitator presence and have also been utilised to measure the presence of the online instructor. Taking the above-mentioned factors into consideration, the expectations from the online facilitator also become prominent.

2.7 Expectations of an online facilitator

According to Apata (2016), an online facilitator acts as a provider of systems to be put in place to control and monitor students' progress and participation to achieve set goals in an online environment. Online facilitators shift from the traditional classroom, where face-to-face interactions with students take place, to an environment that comprises of both synchronous and asynchronous interactions with remote students (Pierce-Friedman & Wellner, 2020). Adnan (2018) argues that the transition from face-to-face to online facilitation also involves changes in facilitators' roles, for example, how they practice pedagogy, social interactions, managerial roles, technical knowledge, instruction to students and interaction with students. Online facilitators fulfil other roles, such as that of course designer, content manager, subject expert and mentor (Martin et al., 2019). Pierce-Friedman and Wellner add that, in addition to their

online roles, online facilitators are also expected to provide individual, distinct and prompt feedback to students in order to assist in attaining the intended learning outcomes. Apata states that one of the roles of an online facilitator might be to alter the facilitation and learning materials to fit the requirements of the students and provide suggestions to developers based on their skills and expertise. Martin et al. (2018) mention that the role of the facilitator is to outline the programme and deliver content to the respective students. According to Nehme (2010), a facilitator should encourage and support students in an online environment by:

1. Constantly motivating online students.
2. Guiding the online students on how the online environment should be utilised.
3. Stimulating engagement and collaboration among online students.
4. Creating group activities to reduce isolated studying.
5. Bringing students together in an online environment.
6. Engaging with students online by monitoring their presence and providing them with continuous feedback.
7. Designing the learning materials and environments tailored to the students.
8. Identifying students' fears, worries, and nervousness as anxiety may negatively affect their motivation and accessibility.

The ability of lecturers to function in their roles is fraught with challenges. The next section focuses on some of the existing challenges that lecturers face when facilitating online learning.

2.8 Online facilitation challenges

Fox et al. (2021) argue that facilitating online learning has now become an important part of higher education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced most teaching and learning to occur in digital spaces. Facilitating online has brought challenges, such as adjusting teaching methods, changing roles of facilitators and transitioning from face-to-face to fully online learning. Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2020) argue that shifting from traditional to online facilitation might result in a feeling of isolation as facilitators work in different physical locations than their colleagues. Gülbahar and Adnan (2020) argue that most facilitators might be new to the online environment and should be trained in order to succeed when facilitating online learning. Singh (2014)

states that an effective way to alleviate fears regarding online facilitation is to create programmes that prepare facilitators to succeed in their facilitation experience. Cutri and Mena (2020) state that it is highly important to identify factors that can hinder or assist in the progress of facilitators' readiness to facilitate online. However, some facilitators reported that the ways in which they deal with the challenges mentioned above have contributed towards improving their facilitation capabilities (Dhilla, 2017).

Time management has been identified as one of the major challenges that contributes towards the ineffectiveness of online education (Giles et al., 2014; Oyarzun et al., 2020). Research indicates that the time spent preparing for and planning to facilitate online learning takes twice as long as doing the same for face-to-face learning (Cavanaugh, 2005). In addition, Allen and Seaman (2015) state that facilitating an online course requires more time and work than facilitating a face-to-face course. Alam (2020) found that one of the issues that were encountered by facilitators and students when using online communication platforms, such as Zoom, was a time limit for meetings, which was exacerbated by technical difficulties that caused delays. However, Oyarzun et al.(2020) suggest that time management strategies can assist in enhancing the effectiveness of online education (Oyarzun et al., 2020). Some of the time management strategies they identified include outlining clear goals and planning well-coordinated course content.

Taking into consideration the skills that online lecturers need and the expectations and challenges of creating an engaging and inviting e-Learning environment where students feel that they belong, the Multimodal model for online education (Picciano, 2021) was used as a framework to guide the study.

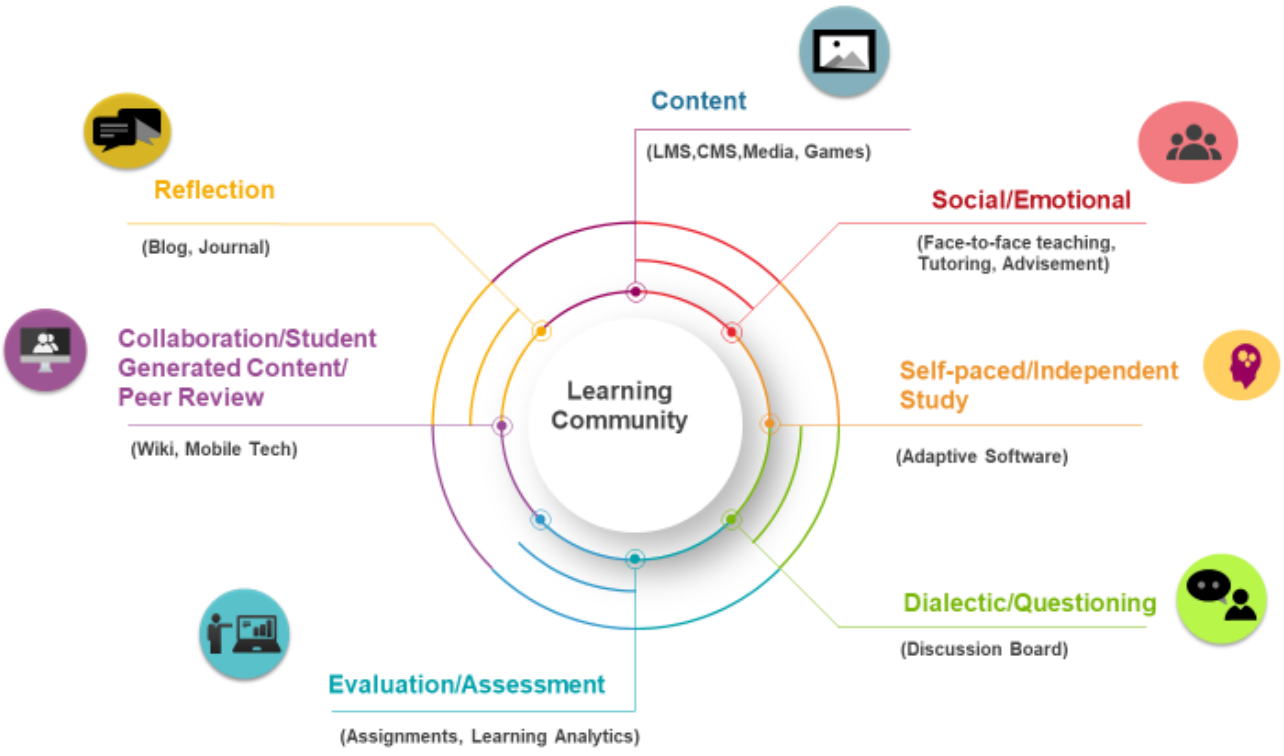
2.9 Theoretical framework – Multimodal model for online education

Anthony Picciano developed a model called "Blending with Pedagogical Purpose" to serve in online education (Picciano, 2009b). This model proposes that mixing the learning objectives, activities and teaching approaches with numerous modalities may be best for, and appeal to, a wide scope of students (Picciano, 2021). Picciano (2009a) created the "Blending with Pedagogical Purpose" model in a manner that allows for it to be adapted by incorporating theories or elements from other models. Therefore, incorporating other elements in the "Blending with Pedagogical Purpose"

model resulted in the Multimodal model for online education. By adding elements from other theories such as self-paced learning and the learning community that stems from the Community of Inquiry created by (Garrison et al., 1999), Picciano (2021) developed the Multimodal model for online education as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Multimodal model for online education (Picciano, 2021)



The illustration shows that each element contributes to the online learning community of students and the facilitator. However, this study will focus on lecturers only.

The Multimodal model for online education was used to guide and focus this research study. The questions in both the online survey and online interview were based on the eight elements of the original framework, as discussed below.

2.9.1 Content

Picciano (2021) points out that content is one of the major factors as far as facilitation is concerned and there are various ways in which lecturers can make content available to students. The author further argues that to deliver online content, Learning

Management Systems such as Blackboard, Moodle and Canvas have been widely used in online education due to their flexibility to accommodate content in different formats. The interview questions for the content element of the model were framed around how the lecturers design the content, the platforms used to deliver it, the relationship between the nature of the content and online facilitation, the challenges encountered and suggestions for improvement. Ausburn (2004) discovered that course notifications from the lecturer, course information, including curriculum, timelines, learning outcomes and marking procedures, and clear guidelines and instructions about assignments were features that were rated as the most important in designing online courses.

Tuga et al. (2021) point out that the shift in the education system, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, require the use of Learning Management Systems and training for its users in order for teaching and learning to continue effectively. Learning designers and lecturers can use a variety of techniques to design online content due to current technological advancements (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). However, Martin and Bolliger (2022) state that an online course cannot be deemed effective by simply duplicating content from a face-to-face programme on a Learning Management System or by delivering the content through synchronous online sessions. Muthuprasad et al argue that to create online courses that are useful and productive, it is crucial to take the student's preferences and perceptions into account. According to Niess and Gillow-Wiles (2013), it is advisable to use a mix of group or collaborative projects, reflective exercises, defined evaluation criteria and technology integration techniques when creating content for an online course. Martin and Bolliger add that students' past knowledge, available time and expected competencies must also be taken into account when designing online courses. Assignments, learning objectives and student learning outcomes must all be aligned (Kebritchi et al., 2017).

Mayer (2014) concluded that learning is reinforced by visualisation, especially in fields such as science where effectively illustrating systems and processes is essential (Mayer, 2014). The practice of incorporating games as part of content is consistently expanding in online learning and it may assist students to learn through virtual representations (De Gloria et al., 2014). For facilitators to deliver content in online

education, having to use technology is most likely inevitable (Park, 2011; Picciano, 2009a).

Due to the extensive preparation and specialised training required for online programme development, converting learning materials developed for face-to-face learning for online learning can be challenging (Cox & Egbue, 2014). However, given the challenges encountered in the content element, the incorporation of design features, content accessibility, multidisciplinary collaboration, encouraging and growing the community among students and facilitators and the use of reliable assessment techniques could mitigate the difficulties (Khan et al., 2017).

Similar to the content element, the next component's interview questions were designed to explore how social or emotional support was provided and the mediums used. The following section discusses the social/emotional support element of the model.

2.9.2 Social/Emotional element

Education is not only about teaching and learning but also includes emotional and social support to students (Picciano, 2021). This element is mainly concerned with the support from the facilitator relating to students' social and emotional development (Picciano, 2009b). In an online environment the facilitator and the student do not physically interact, but engage using technological platforms such as emails and discussion forums on both computers and mobile phones (Martin et al., 2019). Close relationships between students and lecturers within the context of online education can manifest in a variety of social support structures, including emotional support in the form of companionship and feedback from facilitators, as well as informational support in the form of concrete advice and useful guidance (Apker, 2022). Given the significance of the facilitator, developing an instructional relationship with students before and throughout the first week of a course is beneficial (Wolfe & Uribe, 2020). Hu et al. (2022) caution that e-Learning platforms that were not initially intended for social interaction may facilitate significantly less social interaction than social networking sites. Li and Peng (2021) argue that online education can create a community that encourages social connections, allowing students to feel emotionally engaged and supported by their lecturers. Despite the lower frequency of

engagement, Hu et al. are of the opinion that online education may most likely serve as a channel for high-quality social support.

One of the participants in a study conducted by Martin et al. (2019) pointed out that it is essential for the facilitator to be present in an online environment so students do not feel alone and are guided through the study material. The authors suggest that to further create a welcoming environment, synchronous sessions can be scheduled, which may not necessarily be face-to-face, to provide a live type of setting. Similar to the content element, for facilitators to interact in an online environment or be present in an online environment using technology, is inevitable (Picciano, 2021).

Mayer (2020, p. 1) discussed challenges relating to the emotional or social support and that includes “identification”. Identification of emotions in online learning can be a challenge because it requires the recognition of the main emotions that students feel when participating in e-Learning (Loderer et al., 2020). For example, in a face-to-face setting the facilitator interacts directly with students, is able to respond appropriately to their behaviour and can also convey appropriate instructional points, whereas e-Learning is typically presented on an electronic educational system in a static manner without consideration of students’ preferences or non-verbal reactions (Imani & Montazer, 2019). In light of the above-mentioned challenges, Mayer (2020) suggests that in order to identify students’ emotions in e-Learning, the facilitator should concentrate on both positive and negative feelings that students go through.

The interview questions for the following element focused on the lecturers' use of dialectic/questioning techniques and whether these were effective. The dialectic/questioning element of the model is covered in the section that follows.

2.9.3 Dialectics/questioning

This element enables facilitators to question and challenge students’ knowledge to help them improve and get a better understanding of a phenomenon (Picciano, 2009a). Every facilitator should be well-versed in their field. As a result, students are better able to comprehend and fulfill expectations (Windiarti et al., 2019). One of the most crucial duties in higher education is to question, challenge and analyse students’ knowledge (Wals & Jickling, 2002). Students interpret information or content presented in various ways; hence, the use of the dialectic method is crucial to aid in

developing students' knowledge (Wu et al., 2014). Picciano (2009a) emphasises the use of various technology tools available in a Learning Management System, such as discussion boards, wikis and written assignments, to gain insights into students' level of understanding of the content. Liu (2019) further asserts that discussion boards are frequently utilised in online programmes to promote interactivity among students. Moreover, discussion boards also provide students with more time for reflection, as well as opportunities to learn about a topic from diverse perspectives (Chen & Swan, 2020).

One of the challenges raised in a past study was that facilitators tend to apply their traditional facilitation methods to online learning, and it does not seem to be working (Coppola et al., 2001). Due to this, there should be other methods to approach online facilitation, and training programmes may be provided in order to help promote better online education for students (Kebritchi et al., 2017). In addition, the absence of communication and interaction was also one of the prominent complaints about online education (Cole et al., 2014; Coman et al., 2020). Dailey-Hebert (2018) states that the critique is understandable, given that earlier online courses frequently consisted of text-based material and discussion boards or email as the main means of communication.

2.9.4 Reflection

Reflection is defined as the process of putting what was learned into one's own words to better grasp the logic and justifications behind concepts (Agouridas & Race, 2007). Helyer (2015, p. 22) states that the act of reflecting makes use of the knowledge that "lies within (tacit knowledge) – so deep it is sometimes taken for granted and not openly acknowledged, but it is the data individuals use to make instinctual decisions based upon accumulated knowledge from previous actions and experience". Reflective practices for both facilitators and students are considered one of the core methods of teaching. In the online environment facilitators need to create opportunities where students can reflect and review the knowledge they have gained and develop the ability to share with their facilitators and classmates (Picciano, 2009b). Wain (2017) states that reflection is an everyday activity of learning, and it is a very important element in higher education. To encourage student reflection facilitators could use tools such as blogs, as blogging is regarded as a technique that enables students to

critically reflect on what they have learned and how to practically apply the new knowledge and skills in their work role (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2017). Reflection is essential for students to review what they have learned in order to foster growth and in-depth learning (Chang, 2019). Chang adds that reflection activities provide students with a chance to record their educational path and advise others. In the interview, some of the questions dealing with this element focused on what the benefit was of adding reflection in online learning. Picciano (2009a) points out that this element is used in an online environment by utilising relevant tools in Learning Management Systems, such as reflection journals and blogs, which can be used for individual or collaborative learning.

2.9.5 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning occurs when the facilitator divides students into groups with the aim of giving them a group activity to attempt (Laal & Mohammad Ghodsi, 2012; Michael, 2012). Collaborative learning is encouraged in an atmosphere where learning is a collective and interactive process, requiring students to talk, reflect, gather and analyse knowledge as active members of a learning community (El Mhouti et al., 2017). Although collaborative learning has its origins in the traditional classroom, it is widely used in online education (Picciano, 2009b). Some of the interview questions dealing with this element required lecturers to share their experience on the effectiveness of collaborative learning and how they used it in their online classes. Collaborative learning is one of the most effective methods to develop necessary knowledge and abilities (Khan et al., 2022). Students can form social and professional bonds and participate in group projects with ease in face-to-face classrooms. However, in e-Learning there is a geographical separation; therefore, the facilitator should utilise particular techniques to support the formation of a learning community among the students (Sumtsova et al., 2018).

Peer learning is another facilitation technique that has been demonstrated to encourage collaboration and better prepare students for their future employment (Raymond et al., 2016). In higher education, peer learning has been proven to be a successful learning strategy that helps students develop self-confidence and take charge of their own education (Keppell et al., 2011). Gu et al. (2017) suggest that cross-cultural collaborative learning should also be understood by lecturers and

instructional designers as a method of developing relationships through regular interactions, valuing students from different cultures, listening to their opinions and observing their behaviours. Cross-cultural collaborative learning enables facilitators to provide students with a chance to examine their own opinions and respond to classmates' opposing and challenging viewpoints (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

In an online education environment, collaborative learning is achieved by utilising tools such as wikis, group tool functions and discussion boards found in Learning Management Systems (Picciano, 2009b). In a study conducted by Kumi-Yeboah (2018), the findings show that the majority of lecturers concluded that group activities provide students with the chance to share ideas and engage meaningfully on discussion boards and, therefore, contribute to knowledge creation. Moreover, working in smaller groups in e-Learning has the potential of increasing students' level of interest in the topic (Ubaldo, 2021) and their outlook on the entire learning journey (Sumtsova et al., 2018). However, it is important to take note that the way traditional e-Learning courses are typically designed discourages interaction and collaboration. For this reason, online education is often perceived as solitary and individualistic (El Mhouti et al., 2017). Comparatively speaking, the cooperative system of planning a learning activity is less facilitator-centered and more goal-driven than collaborative learning, according to (Sumtsova et al., 2018) As a result, planning demands greater effort.

2.9.6 Evaluation

Although the terms evaluation and assessment can be used interchangeably, in this study evaluation is utilised where it refers to a teaching tool that enables facilitators to assess and monitor the knowledge of students. Evaluation is considered the most important element of the framework (Picciano, 2009b). Any successful facilitation and learning method must include evaluation as a key component (Akimov & Malin, 2020). To assess students in online education, Learning Management Systems have tools such as quizzes, discussion boards, wikis and drop-boxes for written assignments (Arend, 2006). Picciano argues that these tools can aid facilitators in measuring the effectiveness of their teaching, as well as assessing what classroom strategies work and what needs improvement. Interview questions that sought insights into this element included requesting lecturers to describe how they evaluated their students

and whether they believed doing so upheld the criteria required for qualification. Akimov and Malin consider evaluation valid when it enables students to exhibit their understanding of the content being studied, as well as their abilities and values (Akimov & Malin, 2020). In addition to using various learning measurements, such as summative and formative activities, assessments should also adhere to the concepts of fairness, validity and reliability (Hargreaves, 2007). Akimov and Malin point out that facilitators must also consider difficulties with identity security, academic integrity and legality while creating online assessments to meet the standards of accrediting professional and academic bodies. The online environment, therefore, imposes new requirements and places a greater emphasis on the development of content that is appropriate for the medium. However, because the evaluation structure must be closely matched to the desired learning outcomes, creating an effective assessment strategy continues to be a constant challenge for facilitators.

2.9.7 Learning community

There has been a growing trend towards student-centered and virtual community-based forms of learning over the past years as a result of the integration of ICT into learning environments and processes and changes in pedagogical methods (Deng & Tavares, 2013). The learning community stems from the Community of Inquiry model created by Garrison et al. (1999) and Lave and Wenger (1991) who expanded each element of the Community of Inquiry model and described the learning community as an online environment that relies on facilitators to guide as well as students exchanging knowledge. The interview questions sought to understand the lecturers' roles in the learning community and how they impacted the online learning environment for their students.

Virtual learning communities are developed using Web 2.0 tools and other features such as Google documents, email, Zoom video, forums, wikis and blogs which are thought of as alternate pathways that enable learning both within and outside of the e-classroom (Yilmaz, 2016). However, Wolfe and Uribe (2020) state that learning efficacy may be hampered when lecturers only ask students to respond to their questions and do not encourage engagement. The construction of carefully designed interactive activities for students that result in a solid e-Learning community can help alleviate the above-mentioned issue and significantly improve learning by regularly

participating in discussion forums (Chen & Swan, 2020). Picciano (2021) states that an online programme is designed as a learning community and within the element engagement is regarded as crucial.

When creating or facilitating an online course, the above-mentioned elements of the theoretical framework may not necessarily all be incorporated (Picciano, 2021). However, all the six elements described above create a coordinated community of learning and it made sense to add “learning community” to the Multimodal model for online education when it was modified, as cited by Picciano.

2.9.8 Self-paced/Independent study

Another element that was added to the modified Multimodal model for online education is “self-paced study” (Picciano, 2021). Anderson et al. (2005) refer to self-paced study as a type of learning that is dependent on students’ preferences in terms of when to start, what to start with and when to complete their course. The interview questions aimed to elicit information from the lecturers about the efficiency of creating an online environment that is self-paced and how their students reacted to it.

Adaptive release software can be used to direct students in cases of prerequisites or benchmark tests, thus differentiating their learning journeys (Picciano, 2021). Kuo et al. (2014a) argue that self-paced learning is more student-oriented, however, for it to be effective there must be a sense of self-regulation. Zimmerman (2002) refers to self regulation as the manner in which students apply their mental capabilitiies in their studies in a way that that enables them to become self-motivated and set goals to be achieved. Therefore, facilitators play an important role in setting up online modules and creating opportunities for self-paced learning.

Choosing the Multimodal model for online education served as a driver for this study because not only did it provide the elements that needed to be addressed for online facilitation, but it also guided the researcher regarding the interaction between the elements. Therefore, the researcher used this well-researched model as the foundation to develop the data collection instruments and to determine how lecturers experience facilitation in fully online higher education programmes.

2.10 Summary

The history of online learning was covered at the beginning of the chapter. In order to demonstrate different modes of online education electronic learning, blended learning and hybrid learning were discussed.

The chapter also covered the increasing need to develop online programmes and the heightened interest in online facilitation. Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic open opportunities for online programmes and online facilitation, the national and international drivers such as the Sustainable Development Goals also urged education to open up access to e-Learning, as one of the possibilities to achieve such objectives (Silo & Ketlhoilwe, 2020).

To further unpack the literature on the topic, factors that influence lecturers' experiences when they facilitate online learning were discussed. For example, the size of the online class, the use of technology and course design influence the online experience of both the facilitator and the student. As online facilitation is not the norm at many higher education institutions, emphasis must be placed on the professional development of facilitators in areas such as content creation, teaching online and how to create an inviting and engaging learning environment for students where they are encouraged to learn and engage with peers and the facilitator. With the rapid increase in e-Learning online lecturers encounter challenges when facilitating online programmes. To focus on issues that online facilitators experience, this chapter concluded with a discussion of the Multimodal model for online education developed by Picciano (2021), which served as the theoretical foundation for this study. The eight elements of the model namely content, social/emotional, dialectic/questioning techniques, reflection, collaborative learning, evaluation, learning community and self-paced/independent study were discussed and their relationship to the study was indicated.

The following chapter will go over the research methodology. A detailed discussion of the paradigms and approaches chosen for this study will be provided. Following a thorough discussion, the research design, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data analysis, quality criteria, and ethical considerations will be unpacked.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology that guided this study. The selection of an interpretivism paradigm was based on the expectation that it would provide comprehensive insights into lecturers' experiences with facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. In this study, a qualitative research approach was used in order to study participants' experiences. To address the research question, a case study research design was used. This chapter also discusses the data collection and analysis methods, quality criteria and ethical considerations.

3.2 Paradigm

Ontology and epistemology are essential components of any research study (Al-Saadi, 2014). According to Solem (2003), epistemology is implied by the ontology. The area of philosophy known as ontology focuses on the nature of reality or being (Jennings, 2001). As stated by Solem, ontology is concerned with what the world consists of or is. In this study, the nature of reality that is being explored is the experience of lecturers who facilitate fully online programmes. Considerations of the foundations upon which we base our understanding are referred to as epistemology (Fumerton, 2009). The epistemology of this study is concerned with the lecturer's knowledge about facilitating fully online programmes in higher education.

There are several types of ontology and epistemology research paradigms, each with its own set of procedures and philosophical presumptions (Grix, 2018). Positivism, post-positivist, Interpretivism, critical theory and constructivism are among the popular research paradigms (Grix, 2018). This study adopted the interpretivism paradigm. This paradigm offers an effective way to gain insights into a topic from the participants' point of view since it provides thorough knowledge and a detailed understanding of human experiences (Rehman & Alhartu, 2016). Since this study adopted an interpretivism paradigm, it is classified as a qualitative research approach, employing a case study research design. Online interviews and online surveys were undertaken to acquire rich and in-depth insights about lecturers' experiences with facilitating fully online programmes. Creswell and Poth (2016) contend that the above-mentioned methods can help the researcher acquire rich and in-depth insights about the research topic.

The interpretivism paradigm has faced criticism for its limited ability to produce theories that can be applied to society, as well as its failure to address the relationship between the researcher and respondents when collecting data, which can introduce bias (Grix, 2018). Regardless of the critique, Nieuwenhuis (2016) argued that interpretivism draws from phenomenology by emphasising the importance of individuals' subjective interpretations and perspectives. The notion links with this study as it focuses on facilitators experiences and how they interpret and make sense of their online teaching environments

3.3 Approach

There are three types of methodological approaches in research, namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In contrast with quantitative and mixed methods approaches that use numerical data, this study adopted a qualitative methodological approach because the researcher was interested in rich descriptions of facilitators' experiences when facilitating fully online programmes (Mack et al., 2005). The qualitative research approach focuses on observations and words that aim to convey real events (Amaratunga et al., 2002). As stated by Amaratunga et al in a qualitative research approach data are collected over a period of time, which provides certain advantages for analysis and allows for flexibility in the research process. Qualitative research aids in gaining insights into participants' perceptions, opinions, beliefs and experiences regarding a phenomenon (Kuo et al., 2014b). The researcher is aware that this qualitative study is based on the experience of the lecturers over a specific period of time, which may result in leaving out other aspects that do not fall within that timeframe, based on the findings of (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

3.4 Research design

There are several research designs, including phenomenology and grounded theory, among others, that are well-suited to the qualitative approach (Maruster, 2013). However, in this study, a case study design was adopted.

Gerring (2004, p. 342) defines a case study as an "intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units." Case studies are mostly used in qualitative research approaches to explore a phenomenon (Eckstein, 1975)

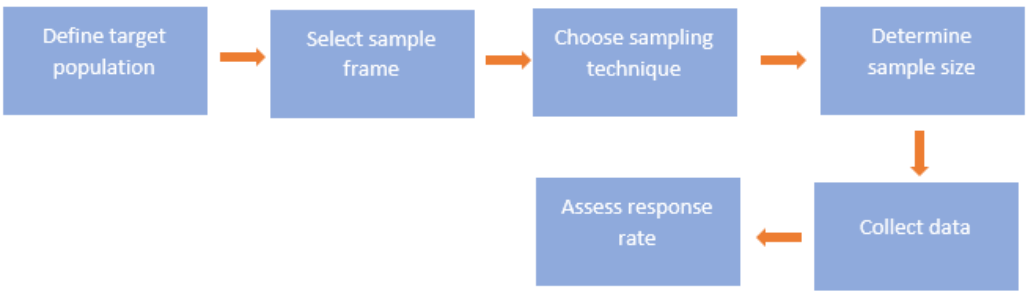
and is applied in this qualitative study in which the researcher aimed at gaining rich insights into lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online programmes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study design is also recognised for its ability to employ triangulation of data (Gerring, 2006). In this study, two instruments, namely an online survey and an online interview, were utilised to collect rich descriptive data from participants in alignment with (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Since the sample size of the study was small, the utilisation of two data collection instruments was necessary to triangulate the findings and enhance the validation of the results (Denzin, 2007). Case studies also explore a single unit of a topic (George & Bennett, 2005) as in this study where the researcher focused on lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. In exploratory case studies, "how" and "what" questions are commonly asked (Yin, 2009, p. 2). In this study, the secondary research question addresses the "how" of the topic. Finally, the research must focus on "real-life" events (Yin, 2009, p. 2). Similar to the work of Mabry (2008), this study explored the first-hand experiences of lecturers as they facilitated fully online programmes in real life. Based on the above-mentioned qualities, it is evident that it was fitting to utilise a case study research design in this study.

3.5 Sampling

Sampling is an essential component of the research process (Ahmad & Halim, 2017). As illustrated in Figure 2, this study followed the sampling process steps proposed by Taherdoost (2016a).

Figure 2

Sampling process steps (Taherdoost, 2016a)



Defining the target population is the first step in the sampling process and it refers to choosing potential participants and the region where the data will be gathered (Taherdoost, 2016b). The target population of this study is lecturers who facilitated fully online programmes at a higher education level, as determined by the primary research question, the scope of this study, characteristics and accessibility. Due to lack of resources and the inability to reach the entire target population, it was not possible to collect data from the entire target population. In the second step, Taherdoost proposes that the target population be further narrowed down to select a sample frame from the refined target audience. This study's sampling frame consisted of lecturers who facilitated fully online programmes within a higher education setting at a specific university in the Gauteng province. All these lecturers received an email inviting them to participate in the study to make sure the sample frame encompassed the intended target population.

For the purpose of doing research, sampling techniques are ways to choose a sample from a broader population (Taherdoost, 2016a). Both qualitative and quantitative research employ sampling techniques to make sure the sample fairly represents the population and permits generalisation of the results (Fricker, 2016). According to Taherdoost, sampling techniques can be divided into two major categories, namely probability or random sampling and non-probability or non-random sampling. Within these two categories, there are several sampling types to choose from.

Probability sampling is when each person in the population has an even opportunity to be chosen to participate in the study and generalisation can be done based on the population (Acharya et al., 2013). Vehovar et al. (2016, p. 327) defines non-probability sampling as "a deviation from probability sampling principles" and do not utilise random selection of participants. Non-probability sampling is mostly used in qualitative approaches and one of the benefits is that the researcher has control over the selection of the sample, such as their fit for the study or availability (Tansey, 2009). Acharya et al. (2013) state that when non-probability sampling is used, generalisations are limited solely to the sample and cannot be extended beyond that. Statistical conclusions cannot be made (Taherdoost, 2016b).

Non-probability sampling can be carried out with participants who are readily available or easily accessible (Weber et al., 2020). This study, therefore, utilised non-probability

sampling because it is affordable, more convenient and versatile. Participants were selected purposefully using the criterion sampling method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). When using a purposeful method, the researcher selects participants and the area of the study with the intention of gathering well-informed data about the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Decisions about who or what to sample are guided by the study's goal, context and intended participants (Emmel, 2013). Participants were chosen based on a specific criterion: they had to be lecturers who were already facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. This method of participant selection enabled the researcher to ensure that the sample is representative of the population of interest and to gain insights into the experience of those who have first-hand experience with facilitating fully online programmes in higher education (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Patton (1990, p. 265) states that, in a qualitative study, the key factors to consider when determining the sample size are the "validity, meaningfulness and insights" collected in the form of data from participants. Malterud et al. (2016) point out that the more relevant the data are to the study, the fewer participants are required. Any qualitative research that follows the principle of "sampling until data saturation is reached" can use it as a rationale for using a specific sample size (Boddy, 2016, p. 427). Yet, in practice, even though the concept of saturation is very helpful, it offers little direction for determining the actual sample sizes before data collection (Guest et al., 2006). Similar to a research study by Carduff et al. (2015), a total of eight lecturers facilitating fully online programmes, namely the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management, at one higher institution participated in this study. Only eight of the lecturers who facilitated fully online programmes accepted the invitation to participate in the study. From the eight that participated in the online survey, five also agreed to participate in the online interview.

3.6 Data collection

Data were collected through an online survey and online interview. Surveys are mostly used in quantitative studies to collect data from a larger sample with the aim to profile the population (Rowley, 2014). In this study, an online survey was used as part of a qualitative study to collect data in order to triangulate the findings (Denzin, 2007). The questions in the survey were in line with the eight elements of the theoretical

framework. A link to the online survey was sent via email to the participating Public Health and Public Management lecturers who facilitated the fully online programmes. Participation was completely voluntary and did not in any way either advantage or disadavantage participants. Out of the eight participants, all completed the online survey and five agreed to participate in an online interview. Hundred percent participation was achieved in the online survey and fifty six percent in the online interview.

An interview is a dialogue between two people in which a researcher questions participants with an aim of collecting data and to gain insights into the phenomenon (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Nieuwenhuis (2016) states that one of the advantages of using an interview is that it provides information that is detailed and aids the researcher in understanding participants' perceptions. In contrast, other instruments like focus group interviews have drawbacks such as groupthink and conformity (Carey & Smith, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2016) state that using an interview in a qualitative study requires a researcher to prepare suitable questions and be patient when participants share their experiences. In this study, interview questions were designed beforehand to collect detailed information about the experiences of lecturers when facilitating fully online programmes.

3.7 Instruments

As already mentioned, an online survey and interview were used as data collection instruments in this study. The online survey was used in this study to triangulate the findings (Breitmayer et al., 1993) . This instrument was selected because it is a cost-effective way to collect data. A set of open-ended questions and Likert items were compiled (refer to **Appendix A**) to address the research questions. A five-point Likert scale was used where (1) represents Strongly disagree, (2) Somewhat disagree, (3) Neither disagree nor agree, (4) Somewhat agree and (5) Strongly agree. The participants' responses to the online survey questions are reported as S1-S8 to ensure anonymity. Due to the nature of the Likert items, it was not possible to identify the participants. However, participants could be identified through their responses to the open-ended questions. Therefore, participants were assigned identification numbers (S1-S8). The online survey was developed in Qualtrics, an online survey software, and the link was sent to the participants via email.

Online interviews were used as a second data collection instrument. There are three types of interviews, namely unstructured, semi-structured and structured. This study used a semi-structured interview. When a semi-structured interview is used, the researcher prepares open-ended questions before the interview, and probing and further explanations are allowed (Alsaawi, 2014; Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, 2016). A set of questions (refer to **Appendix B**) were compiled prior to the interview in order to gather rich data about the experience of the facilitators in online programmes. Participants were assigned identification numbers (P1-P5) to report their responses to the interview questions. The responses were recorded by Blackboard Collaborate, a tool embedded in the Blackboard Learning Management System.

3.8 Data analyses

In order to analyse qualitative data, this study followed two general steps: the preparation of data and the coding of data, as suggested by Nieuwenhuis (2016). According to Nieuwenhuis, the first step in data analysis is to prepare the data so that it can be organised in a manner that will aid the researcher to easily access it when needed. In this step, the data is downloaded, saved and then transcribed. Transcribing data requires writing down the collected data word for word. In this study, the online interviews were held on a platform called Blackboard Collaborate, that allowed the sessions to be recorded. After the interview sessions, the recordings were downloaded and imported into Otter.ai, a speech to text application, which was used to transcribe the recordings. The transcripts were then checked for accuracy.

In terms of coding, Seers (2012) argues that it involves organising data by grouping responses and adding categories. Data was interpreted by paying attention to the patterns that were created when organising and coding (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). In this study, data were analysed deductively (Azungah, 2018) by transcribing, coding and grouping data according to the elements in the framework provided by the Multimodal model for online education (Picciano, 2021). Data were analysed and coded in accordance with the research questions which relate to the factors and challenges lecturers experience when facilitating fully online modules as well as the solutions. Furthermore, the researcher focused on the eight elements of the framework under the three research questions which assisted with grouping the data.

There are various methods of analysing qualitative data, such as content analysis (Kirkwood, 2018), narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) and thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017). This study utilised thematic analysis because it enables one to find, examine and present patterns or themes in data that was collected (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). According to Braun and Clarke (2012), when attempting to comprehend shared experiences, thoughts or actions throughout a data set, thematic analysis is a suitable and effective technique to apply. Since the aim of this study was to explore lecturers' experiences with facilitating fully online programmes, thematic analysis is a suitable method, given that it is intended to look for shared or common meanings.

3.9 Quality criteria

Quality assurance in a qualitative study is achieved by maintaining trustworthiness. Polit and Beck (2010) refer to trustworthiness as the extent to which data are collected and interpreted in a manner that does not compromise the quality of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1986) created four criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. The criteria, their definitions and how they were implemented in this study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Quality criteria

Criteria	Meaning	How it was maintained
Credibility	Credibility refers to the belief about the "truth" of the findings of a study (Polit & Beck, 2010).	Triangulation was used in this study to maintain credibility (McBrien, 2008). In order to verify the results as true, data were gathered using two instruments: an online survey and interview.
Dependability	Dependability relates to the stability and consistency of the data and the findings through time (Shenton, 2004).	Dependability was maintained by recording, in detail, the steps taken during the research and by keeping the interview recordings for audit trail purposes, if needed.
Confirmability	Confirmability refers to the degree in which the findings are supported by the data and unaffected by the researcher's biases or assumptions. The findings may be independently confirmed by other parties (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).	Since an online interview was used as an instrument to collect data, confirmability was enhanced by keeping the recordings of all the interviews and transcripts to assist with compiling the data for reporting the findings. The interview recordings can be listened to, if necessary. The researcher did not let her imagination cloud her interpretations and judgement, but give a true reflection of participants experiences.
Transferability	Transferability refers to the extent in which findings of the study can be generalised (Polit & Beck, 2010).	Transferability was enhanced through the collection of rich data gathered from the online interviews. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to make sure that the population is correctly represented and the context is described in detail.

3.10 Ethics

After ethical clearance had been received through the relevant structures within the university, a consent form was compiled and attached when conducting interviews to avoid violating participants' rights and privacy. This study aimed at maintaining confidentiality and transparency when data were collected. Wiles et al. (2008) describe confidentiality in a research study as the way in which the researcher does

not disclose information presented by participants. In addition, it is further argued that findings must be reported in a manner in which the participants cannot be identified. In terms of anonymity, Wiles et al also point out that when collecting data, a researcher must request written consent from the participants if they wish to abandon their right to confidentiality or to avoid violation, as supported by (Walford, 2005; Wiles et al., 2008). Although the sample siza of the study was small, the participants might be identifiable but no link can be made to their responses. The researcher made every effort to maintain the anonymity of participants in all the reporting, including articles, conference presentations and the dissertation, by using pseudonyms. All data received were password protected and will be saved in the university repository for a period of 15 years. All ethical procedures, in line with the University of Pretoria ethical policies, were followed.

3.11 Summary

Chapter 3 provided a detailed discussion of the research methodology used in this study. The chapter highlighted the importance of ontology and epistemology as the fundamental research pillars that informed and guided this study. Additionally, various paradigms were discussed, including interpretivism. However, interpretivism was the paradigm utilised in this study. The interpretivism paradigm was chosen based on its recognised ability to assist with the understanding of the meaning and interpretations of phenomena and the lived experiences associated with them. Interpretivism was also selected in this study to assist with providing and gathering in-depth insights into the experiences of lecturers when facilitating fully online programmes in higher education.

After considering various research techniques, this study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study design to explore participants' experiences and gather detailed insights about the topic. The sampling process steps identified by Taherdoost (2016a) were discussed in this chapter. These steps are: defining the target population, selecting the sample frame, selecting a sampling technique, determining the sample size and collecting and analysing data. Participants were selected purposefully, using the criterion sampling method. Eight lecturers facilitating fully online programmes from one higher institution agreed to participate in this study. An online survey and interview were used to gather data, which was then thematically analysed. The chapter also covered quality criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of the

findings as well as the ethical considerations to maintain confidentiality and transparency.

In the next chapter, data are analysed, allowing a thorough investigation and breakdown of the findings. An in-depth analysis of the patterns, themes and insights, as guided by the thematic analysis approach, is done. The interpretation of the data, resulting in a richer and more detailed understanding of the research topic is covered.

Chapter 4: Data analyses and findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the data analysis and findings from the online interviews and the online survey responses. The findings from these instuments were triangulated and discussed to answer the research questions, which include the factors of the theoretical framework. Findings were further analysed in relation to the current literature recorded in Chapter 2.

4.2 Background of the participants

Earlier, it was mentioned in Chapter 3 that both an online survey and online interview were preferred as data collection instruments in this study. The online survey was distributed to the participants in order to collect data as a way to triangulate the findings. Eight lecturers (identified as S1-S8) from one higher eduation institution, facilitating fully online programmes, namely Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management, participated in the online survey developed in Qualtrics. The responses to the online survey questions were exported from the software.

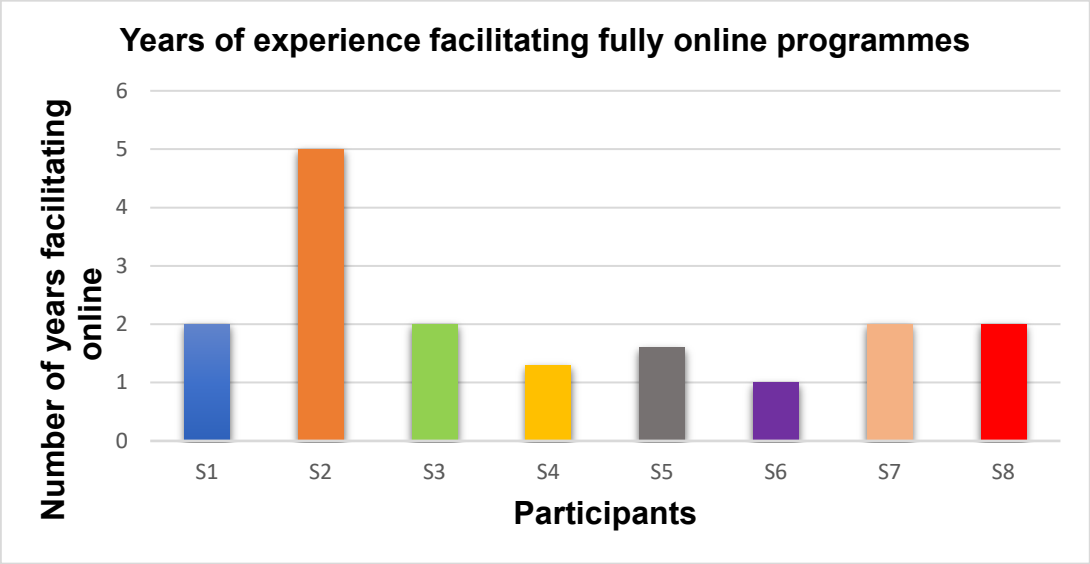
Participants were asked to indicate whether they had ever facilitated a fully online programme in order to determine if they met the inclusion criteria and eligibility to participate in the study (screening question). All eight of the participants responded positively to the screening question, indicating that they had facilitated a fully online programme. This resulted in hundred percent participation and the continuation of the participants in the online survey.

Once the online survey had been distributed and completed, online interviews were conducted. Of the eight participants that responded to the online survey, five agreed to be interviewed. The online interview also began with a screening question. It is imperative for screening to be done, in order to avoid interviewing participants who have never been exposed to online faclitation (DeSimone et al., 2015). If participants responded negatively when asked if they had been exposed to online facilitation, the researcher would not continue with the interview. All five facilitators (identified as P1-

P5) who were interviewed, responded positively to the screening question and indicated that they were facilitating fully online programmes.

Figure 3

Years of experience in facilitating fully online programmes

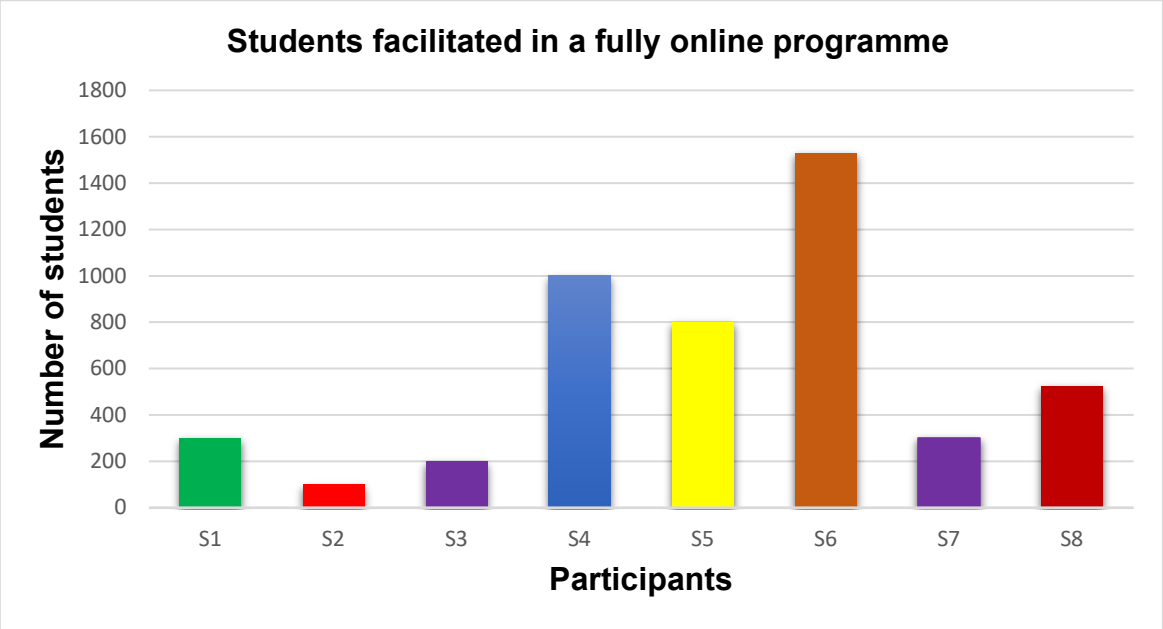


The participants (S1-S8) were further asked to indicate the years they have been facilitating fully online programmes. As seen in Figure 3, the majority of the participants (S1, S2, S3, S7 and S8) have facilitated fully online programmes for at least two years. However, most of the participants (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7 and S8) did not have more than two years' facilitation experience because the two qualifications under review only started in 2020 and, therefore, they could only begin facilitating the fully online programmes in 2020.

Of the eight participants (S1-S8) that completed the online survey, two facilitated the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management (S1 and S2) and six facilitated the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health (S3-S8). All the participants indicated that they had no formal training to facilitate online.

Figure 4

Number of students facilitated in a fully online programme



Irrespective of the fact that online qualifications at the university are fairly new, and some of the facilitators have barely two years of experience, class sizes are quite large. As indicated in Figure 4, the participants (S1-S8) supported students ranging from 100 to 1530 in a class. This is important because the majority of the participants have, on average, two years' experience in online facilitation with more than 200 students per class. Hence, it can be assumed that they have sufficient experience to draw on and report.

4.3 Factors that influence the facilitation experience

Several factors could influence the facilitating experience of online facilitators. When asked, all the participants indicated that they either somewhat agree (six participants) or strongly agree (two participants) that they enjoy facilitating online programmes. When asking for clarification in the online interview, all the participants thought that their online facilitation experience was a bit more challenging than face-to-face facilitation. Preparations were thought of as a factor that is time-consuming (P1, P3 and P4), learning and using new techniques for assessments (P2) and facilitating fully online for the first time (P3, P4 and P5) contributed to the challenging experiences. However, participants also mentioned that as soon as they understood what was expected from them and received support, such as being allocated a learning designer

to work with them (P2, P5), things became better. P5, mentioned, “having the online facilitation experience, it's brilliant…I feel very comfortable doing it.” This is an indication that participants were initially a bit reluctant and less confident when they started. However, upon completing the online facilitation, they acknowledged the value and ease of online facilitation. The value of support and preparing facilitators for online facilitation (P2, P5) aligns with Junus et al. (2021) that some participants were not adequately prepared to adjust and facilitate online learning. They emphasised the importance of assessing the facilitator’s preparedness.

The next section discusses the eight elements of the theoretical framework, namely the Multimodal model for online education (Picciano, 2021). Each element was aligned to various questions in the online survey and interview. The questions addressed the factors that influence lecturers’ online facilitation experiences, challenges they face and how these challenges can be addressed.

4.3.1 Content

Content refers to how learning material was made available and delivered in various ways to the students (Picciano, 2021). All the participants agreed to some extent that they enjoyed delivering content to the online students (S1-S8). P1 indicated that providing students with more resources led to them studying further on their own. P1 added that “when I had my live sessions, students were always very thankful for the detailed presentation and giving additional resources……so, online really works.”

Other participants also appreciated the support received from the learning designers regarding content development (P2, P3 and P5). P5 stated, “I don't believe that anyone can really design a proper online programme, without an instructional designer.” This is an indication that universities need to take note that ongoing support is a necessity for facilitators to present quality content in an online space, especially if they are new to online learning. This is consistent with Almaiah et al. (2020) findings that facilitators’ support and readiness are important elements in online facilitation.

Participants also felt that students constantly needed their support and guidance (P2 and P5). P2 stated, “The instructions had to be clear, the deadlines needed to be clear and manageable.” This is corroborated by Ausburn (2004) finding that clear instructions are rated as one of the most crucial elements when designing an online

programme. Various tools, such as H5P (P1), crossword puzzles (P1), branching scenarios (P1) and YouTube videos (P4), are available to create content, and the Learning Management System with its existing e-resource software was used to deliver content (S1-S8). To support the above, P3 stated, "…I think the minor difference may be that you can have a number of alternatives that you can provide, when you are teaching online than when it's face to face." Similar thoughts were expressed by P5 when she said, "I also particularly liked that content could be delivered in a variety of ways."

In terms of the challenges participants pointed out that the designing content was very difficult (P2 and P3). Technology illiteracy (P3) and difficulties to develop creative content (P3) (P4), contributed to the encountered challenges. Uncertainty about the amount of information to include for facilitation and the time students should spend reading (P1) were other challenges encountered. P1 stated the following:

> *"The one thing is deciding how much information you want to give in your lecture, and how much information you want the students to read at their own time. So just getting the balance, right. But also, not to give too many assignments or too many additional reading material, because not everyone has the same amount of time."*

P4 also shared the following:

> *"Okay, before, it felt as a bit of daunting, because if you haven't done anything before, always you get some nerves. Takes a lot of preparation, obviously. But you never know what will happen until the point where then the module is up and running, then you Yeah, there's also some challenges when the Module starts running, because it was a first time."*

Similarly, Junus et al. (2021) found that revising content and the design of the course for online delivery led to low confidence levels among first-time online facilitators. P4 felt that "the most challenging thing is that you don't get to see the reaction when the student interacts with the content of the module."

In light of the challenges mentioned above, the participants also came up with suggestions and ways to improve the experience of presenting online programmes.

The suggestions included keeping facilitation sessions short and informative (P1), checking the module regularly before it goes live (P2), having more appealing presentations (P3, P4 and P5) and using appealing videos (P4). These suggestions are in line with the results of a study conducted by Mayer (2014) who found that visualisation promotes learning and enhances illustration.

4.3.2 Social/Emotional

Since the physical aspect is mostly absent during online studies, emotional and social support for students becomes important (Picciano, 2021). P5 mentioned that the students were able to share when they had mental problems. P2, P4 and P5 felt that it was quite easy to provide social support. The following was shared by P5:

> *"….there were some students who had mental issues and, or emotional issues. And they were willing to share that with me. And I could give them either extension, depending on what the issue was, I could manage it on a case by case basis, we also didn't have in the beginning such large numbers where we couldn't allow for some, you know, discretion to be used in certain cases…. I think…, the social part is, is relatively easy, because you can do that either through discussions, forums, and, you know, sending messages and participating and giving feedback and seeing people respond."*

Participants used online discussion rooms in the Learning Management System, called "Coffee Shop" and "Facilitator Emergency Rooms" that students, facilitators and tutors could communicate in. The "Coffee Shop" is a discussion forum created for students to collaborate and communicate with one another and serves as an informal space similar to the on-campus cafeteria for student discussions. Facilitators and tutors did not participate in this forum. The "Facilitators Emergency Room" is a discussion forum created for students to interact with the facilitator and tutors regarding questions and queries they had. This discussion forum was monitored by the facilitators and tutors twice daily and they provided prompt feedback to student inquiries (P1, P2, P4 and P5). This forum served as a means of communication with students similar to that of traditional a classroom where all students have access to the responses to questions and queries. P2, stated that "students loved the Coffee shop…they could socialise amongst themselves." The importance of social presence

and facilitator presence was also found by Martin et al. (2019) claiming that an online facilitator should be present in order for students to not feel alone.

Participants felt that providing emotional support was somewhat more difficult than providing social support (P1, P2, P3 and P4). P1 had over 500 students, which could be considered a large class size and tending to each students' emotional needs was almost impossible. However, students had an option to contact the "students' support unit" which is made up of experts that deal with the emotional and mental wellness of students. P2 mentioned that most of the students would feel overwhelmed at the beginning of the course. However, as they proceeded and got a better understanding of what was expected the emotional reactions became positive. This study's findings are similar to those of Jiang and Koo (2020) who found that students often have varied emotions, such as "happiness and frustrations" and facilitators should be aware of them and have techniques of dealing with such. In this regard, P3 shared the following:

> *"Well, initially,… I could feel the distance, you know, because I was not used to talking to the computer, but now….,I can interact with students online. So, I think somewhat, I feel that now I am able to understand and to feel, you know, someone's challenges or emotions or understanding or lack of understanding online, which was not the case when I started."*

In order to improve social/emotional support in online modules, participants suggested that more opportunities had to be created for students to interact (P1, P2). For example, participation in discussion forums can be encouraged (P1, P2) or other platforms can be created for students to interact (P2). For those students who need more support, links to emotional support information can also be added to the Learning Management System (P4).

4.3.3 Dialectic/Questioning techniques

Questioning techniques permit facilitators to assess and challenge students' knowledge to help them improve and get a better understanding of a topic (Picciano, 2021). The responses from the online survey show that five out of the eight participants enjoyed using questioning techniques and three did not. The types of questioning techniques that were used in the modules were, for example, application-based

questions (P2, P3 and P5), multiple choice questions (P2, P3 and P4), probing questions for case studies (P2 and P3), discussion forums (P2, P3 and P4), blogs (P3) essay questions (P2 and P3), reflection journals (P4 and P5) and written assignments (P4). The above-mentioned questioning techniques were beneficial for students, especially the application-based questions (P2 and P5). For example, case studies helped students apply what they had learned in their respective professions (P2 and P5). To support the above, P2 stated the following:

> *"……. there has to be more application based. And this is also because of the profile of the student. So, because they work, they're really working students that work in different environments, they are postgraduate, there has to be more application more that they could apply."*

Moreover, the multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions in the online quizzes tested students' knowledge (P2), while the open-ended questions in the discussion forums assisted facilitators in assessing students' level of understanding for a particular topic (P3 and P4). This is in accordance with Liu (2019), who stipulated that it is highly important for questioning techniques, such as open-ended questions in discussion forums, to be utilised in online learning as they stimulate engagement amongst students.

Participants encountered challenges where students did not fully manage to unpack concepts that were taught, not clearly understanding the instructions (P2, P3 and P5). One participant (P1) pointed out that one of their techniques involved adjusting or changing their approach if students had challenges with unpacking the tasks in such a way that the students would be able to follow the instructions and complete the task successfully. Other participants suggested that instructions had to be very clear for students to fully understand what was required (P2 and P4) and that the facilitator could also try to change the style of questioning (P1). While some participants enjoyed using questioning techniques in the online modules, others were not convinced of their usefulness. However, there is room for improvement: the above-mentioned suggestions may have the potential to mitigate the encountered challenges in future.

4.3.4 Reflection

Reflection refers to the way in which students review the knowledge learned and their ability to share their thoughts with their facilitators and classmates (Picciano, 2021). In this study, half of the participants were neutral about reflection, while the other half liked using reflections in their online classroom. P2, P4 and P5 thought that it was important to include reflection activities such as, reflection journal entries and blog posts in their modules because they were able to see what the students learned and if the learning objectives were archived. According to Wain (2017), reflective practice is beneficial in online learning because it is an everyday activity of learning. P1, also mentioned that the reflection activities enabled him to see how students applied the concepts and if there was anything of concern, such as lack of understanding in any topic, so that it could be addressed immediately. P1 further stated, “what's interesting is you see how they grow confidence in the module content, week on week.” The aspect of growth in confidence in online facilitation can be seen from both the perspective of the facilitator and the student. This aligns with Alqurashi (2019) research that supports the notion that high levels of confidence lead to satisfaction. Participants felt that the inclusion of reflections was important. P5 reported, “I wanted students to critically think about content and their own practice.” P2 stated, “It was also good, because you could see where they struggled. Or you could see where they needed help. Or you could just know where they believe that they did well.” P4 corroborated the above by stating the following:

> *“….it is a good way where the student can pause and reflect and think about what they've learned. And then as a lecturer, you can see the thought process of the students, what they were going on, in terms of their emotions, and so on, and what they've learned, and where they find things difficult.”*

Although participants realised the value of reflections, P5 felt that students “did not critically reflect they were able to describe and they were able to apply to the context, but they don't yet reflect on a change of practice.” This illustrates that even though facilitators provide well described instructions, their intention of the reflection and the outcome of the reflection were still not met. According to P5, more attention must be

given to clearly outlining the instructions of the reflection and its intention for students to complete the task successfully.

4.3.5 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning refers to the facilitator arranging students in different teams with the goal of giving them a task to attempt as a group (Laal & Mohammad Ghodsi, 2012; Michael, 2012). Seven of the eight participants enjoyed using collaborative learning in their online modules. However, it must be acknowledged that one of the eight did not. This might have been influenced by the challenges that come with collaborative learning (Jackson et al., 2018). All the participants that were interviewed agreed that collaborative learning assisted and enabled their students to learn from each other (P1–P5). P1 mentioned that it was important to include collaborative learning in the module because it allows students from diverse backgrounds to learn from one another and share their distinct skills and knowledge. P2 thought collaborative learning assisted with "building students' interpersonal skills and working well with others" by using "peer marking activities and group activities." P4 also added that "it is a good way of getting students to work as a team." According to Keppell et al. (2011), group work and peer activities are beneficial and necessary in online facilitation because they can aid students in gaining trust in their own capacity and taking control over their studies.

P1, stated that the students' individual schedules made it challenging to learn collaboratively. Although realising the value of collaborative learning, P5 also mentioned that the students did not respond as positively to group activities as compared to "peer mark activities". P5 shared the following regarding the element:

> *"So, the students don't particularly like group work. The...peer assessments I find works well. And in most instances, I would say in 90% of the of the instances, the students appreciate the feedback they get from their peers, we do not formally assign..."*

P4 shared a similar thought and stated the following:

> *"But it depends what type of an assessment is… I find most of the time when you give them group assessments, there will be those who work*

nicely as a team. And then there will be those who really fight and they don't come to the party."

This suggests that students prefer to work in pairs rather than in small groups, as it is easier to collaborate with one another. This was also found by Ubaldo (2021), who pointed out that students prefer to work in pairs because it is much simpler to discuss ideas, resolve issues and share knowledge. P5 mentioned that "students complained that they did not get participation from all the group members. So, group dynamics were problematic for the students themselves".

While students complain about collaborative learning, P1 also suggested that collaborative learning "has to be kept to a minimum, because not everyone's time schedule allows that." Successful peer activities and group work must be carefully planned, less time-consuming and have clear requirements for the task (Seifert & Feliks, 2019). Participants may need to reconsider how they structure their peer and group activities to ensure ease and convenience for online students.

4.3.6 Evaluation/Assessment

Evaluation refers to a facilitation tool that allows facilitators to assess and monitor students' knowledge (Picciano, 2021). Continuous assessment was used in the online modules that the participants (P2, P3 and P5) facilitated.

Six of the eight participants enjoyed evaluating students in an online learning environment and thought that the forms of assessments that were used for evaluations were effective. In addition, P5 stated that when students are continuously assessed, they regularly participate in the activities and the assessments keep them active, while they do not lose interest. P2 pointed out that the feedback provided to students "needed to be very specific." According to Susilana and Pribadi (2021, p. 519), constructive feedback should be "accurate, relevant, specific, immediate, understandable, tailored, non-judgmental content in spoken or written language and offer suggestions for better development". Susilana and Pribadi (2021) state that constructive feedback is considered to be one of the core elements for successful online learning. This would explain the need for feedback to be clear, concise and specific to encourage learning to take place.

P1 mentioned possible challenges with marking the assessments because of the large number of students in the online class. The following was mentioned by P1:

> *"That's a major challenge, because of the large classes. So, you try and have assignments or tests that automatically marked like your MCQ's, for example. But I also tried to have a bit more challenging assignment, but not too many. We were lucky we had tutors."*

P1 pointed out that the availability of tutors assisted with the marking load. The participant also added that it is important to include assessments that can be automatically marked by the system because "the longer the format, the more time it takes to mark." According to Susilana and Pribadi (2021), assessments must be structured to either assess learning or assess for learning. This means that substandard assessments cannot be designed for convenience, but assessments should be designed with the learner and learning in mind. P4 reported that some of the students copied one another's, which made it difficult to determine the students' true performance. P4 mentioned that "this is something that one has to think about in the future." This is cause for concern.

According to Rodríguez et al. (2021), when designing online content, assessment activities must be structured in such a way that students cannot copy. This question concerns the quality of certain assessments in the modules and their value. As with the other elements, issues were encountered, and the solutions provided may possibly mitigate the challenges in the future.

4.3.7 Learning community

The learning community is referred to as an online environment that includes the facilitator as a guide and students exchanging information. It also extends to other members with interaction regarded as the main connector (Picciano, 2021). Six of the eight participants agreed that they understood the influence they had in creating the learning community for students and that they had positive experiences as part of the learning community. P1 stated that the role of the facilitator was to "design the module, make sure that students can benefit from the content, and that they are able to apply it." P1 indicated that the facilitator influenced the online learning environment through interactive content. There was also a lot to be learned from students; P2 referred to it

as a “two-way street”. P3 perceived the role of the facilitator in the learning community as “providing an environment that is conducive to learning” and providing guidance to students. According to P4, working closely with the learning designer in the development of an online programme while implementing the best methods for content delivery also contributed to creating a learning community. P5 felt that one of the key elements that made the experience of being part of the learning community positive, was having tutors and class representatives in the module. The class representatives helped with distributing important information to their classmates and made communication between the facilitator, tutors and students very easy.

Based on how the participants responded and interpreted the questions regarding this element, it can be assumed that they did not fully understand what their role in the learning community was. It is also possible that they did not fully understand the concept. Attention must be given to explaining to facilitators their role in the learning community and its importance. Facilitators suggested that in terms of improvements relating to the learning community, more involvement from faculty members should be encouraged, such as having guest lecturers (P1) and constantly offering and improving training for tutors as the classes and groups continue to grow (P5).

4.3.8 Self-paced/ Independent study

Anderson et al. (2005) refer to self-paced study as a type of learning that is dependent on the students’ preferences in terms of when to start, what to start with and when to complete their course. Seven of the eight participants responding to the online survey indicated that they enjoyed facilitating fully online programmes where learning is self-paced. In addition, all five of the interviewees claimed that the online students responded well to the self-paced approach. In support of the above, P1 shared the following:

> *“I think my experience was a positive experience. Because what I tried to do as much as I could, is to have my, my lectures, be very short, but get straight to the point. You don't give unnecessary, unnecessary information. But you always provide more resources and more examples. So, I think doing it that way. Students can go through the material, much easier to understand something, they can re-watch the*

> *video 20 times and until they can understand. So, I think it worked, it worked quite well. Having that resource."*

P1 believed this was the case because the majority of their students were working professionals and the due dates for activities were set up for weekends in order to accommodate them. P1 confirmed that "online learning is beneficial because they can do it either after work or over the weekends." P2 further elaborated that self-paced learning enabled the students to "direct the pace" of their studies. Moreover, other participants (P3 and P5) reported that students appreciated the flexibility that came with online learning, including the benefit of not physically being on campus and accessing the module anytime and anywhere (P4).

P3 shared the following:

> *"Well, well, I think it the fact that technology gives that flexibility, it makes it more effective. Because unlike face to face where you have this specific time, quite often, you're limited in terms of the extent to which you can give feedback, or you can get perspectives from the students, you know, you is flexible with online learning"*

P5 mentioned that "it is flexibility that online learning is supposed to encourage…our modules support the notion of self-paced learning."

According to Ma (2022), self-paced learning can positively (freedom) or negatively (procrastination) influence students' performance, and its four elements, namely technology, study material, study plan and evaluation, should be clearly outlined for effective online learning. In terms of the challenges encountered, P1 mentioned that students would often get in touch to point out issues like "not having electricity and weak internet connectivity." Facilitators suggested future improvements in this regard, such as clearly communicating deadlines, which allows students to plan and avoid the need to request extensions (P5), incorporating a variety of activities to enhance participation in independent study (P3) and combining similar activities to reduce repetition (P4).

4.4 Value of support

In order to ensure that all the data was collected, participants were also asked to mention additional factors outside the elements of the framework discussed above, that may have influenced their online facilitation experience. A common theme that ran through most of the feedback responses was the value of support. All the participants mentioned that they needed support to convert the learning material to online content, design the course, apply suitable questioning techniques, structure clear reflection questions and evaluation methods and be an effective member in the learning community. According to Kang et al. (2002, p. 566), "support is defined as a domain with emotional, informational, material and evaluative aspects."

P1, hold in esteem the support received from the faculty, which made the facilitation experience a positive one. While other participants including P1, valued the support received from the learning designers, they thought it was very important and a huge positive contribution towards effectively facilitating online learning (P2, P3 and P5).

P5 mentioned the following regarding the importance of the support received from the learning designer:

> *"The input that we had from the instructional designer that was, you know, really important in terms of ensuring that the course was well designed, that the content spoke to the learning outcomes that the content was understood by the students that, you know, that we came across well, that our communication was clear."*

P1 also corroborated on the support by stating the following:

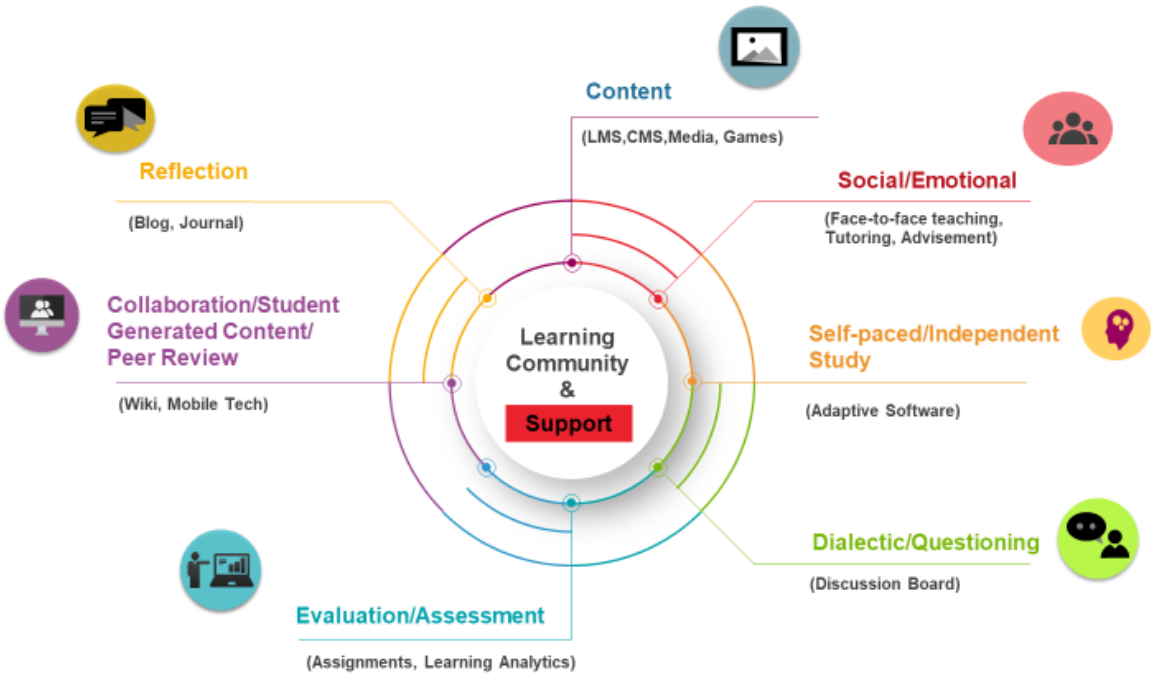
> *"I would say the biggest thing is to have the support both from the educational consultant. Because if I have a new idea, it may be great, but it may not work in an online environment, because I don't have that much experience. So, it's very good to have a skilled person to tell you, I like your idea. But you need to think if the class were bigger than 500, would this really work? And I think that worked for me where, what I had learned, but not necessarily come to fruition, I need to think of a different way to get the message across. So, I think support is the one thing."*

It was also stated in the study conducted by Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2020, p. 1) that " instructors must be continually supported in their quest to provide excellent teaching." Furthermore, opportunities for professional development as discussed in the literature, can also aid facilitators to feel less alone and distant from their colleagues, create a community of students, enhance facilitating and boost capabilities (Alexiou-Ray & Bentley, 2015). Moreover, the continuous support provided to students by the facilitators, faculties and student support units (P2) as well as detailed planning (P4) played a huge role in mitigating the challenges.

As already indicated in Chapter 2, the Multimodal model for online education was a result of the addition of other elements in the initial model called Blending with Pedagogical purpose, created by Antony Picciano (Picciano, 2009a). Therefore, it is advised that support be considered as an additional element of the Multimodal model for online education, as discovered in this study based on the discussion above.

Figure 5

Multimodal model for online education (Support included) (Picciano, 2021)



4.5 Summary

This chapter focused on the findings derived from the data that were collected through an online interview and online survey. The discussion also included the analysis of the findings and comparison with existing research findings, as discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter began with a brief background discussion of the data collection process, including the instruments used, which were discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Following the background discussion, the chapter analysed the data and reported the findings as guided by the eight elements of the Multimodal model of online education, developed by Picciano (2021). In the content element, the findings show that all the participants enjoyed delivering content to the online students, with emphasis placed on the support received from the learning designers. A few challenges were encountered, however, the solutions to reduce the issues were suggested. From both data sets, it was confirmed that participants enjoyed delivering content to students in an online environment hosted on the Learning Management System.

In the social/emotional element, findings show that lecturers found it challenging to provide the emotional support in online learning when compared to the social support. The tools that were embedded in the Learning Management System, namely the “Coffee Shop” and “Facilitator Emergency Rooms” contributed to lecturers finding it easy to provide social support. With the dialectic/questioning techniques, it was found that the types of activities given to students, such as application-based questions, multiple-choice questions and discussion forums, were beneficial as they enabled them to apply what was learned in their professions.

The findings for reflection show that the participants thought it was important to include activities relating to the element because it enabled them to see what the students had learned and if the learning objectives were archived. With collaborative learning, the lecturers thought that this element enabled their students to learn from one another. With regard to the evaluation element, the lecturers enjoyed assessing students in an online learning environment and thought that the forms of assessments that were used for evaluations were effective. For the learning community, the findings indicate that the way the participants interpreted the online interview and online survey questions,

illustrates that they did not fully understand what their role was with this element. In self-paced/independent learning, the participants indicated that their students responded well to the approach because most of them are working professionals and benefited from the due dates of the activities being set up for weekends.

Finally, the value of support was discovered as another factor that influenced lecturers' online facilitation experiences and it is suggested that this be added as an additional element to the Multimodal model for online education. Chapter 5 provides a thorough and detailed review of the major findings and combines them to draw the conclusions of this study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this final chapter, the researcher briefly summarises the study, discusses the findings and describes how it responds to the main research questions. The researcher also reflects on the experience throughout the study, focusing on the methodology, the findings and the value for other researchers. The researcher ends the chapter with final recommendations for future research in the field.

5.1 Summary

This study was motivated by what the researcher found in the literature and her personal observations about lecturers' experiences facilitating fully online programmes. Since it was the lecturers' first-time experience facilitating fully online programmes, the researcher became curious about their insights. The researcher's curiosity led to identifying the problem that this study aimed to address, which was to close the gap in existing research about lecturers' online facilitation experience, and thus, contribute to the much-needed discussion about online facilitation and learning. Once the problem had been identified, the following research question guided this study:

What are lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education?

To respond to the above-mentioned research question, the following sub questions were asked:

1. What are the factors that influence the lecturer's experiences when facilitating fully online modules?
2. What challenges do lecturers experience when facilitating fully online modules?
3. How do lecturers address these challenges when facilitating fully online modules?

To explore the literature about the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education (Chapter 2), the researcher examined variations of online education such as e-Learning, blended learning and hybrid learning. Although it might be said that e-Learning and its variations evolved from distance learning (Simonson & Schlosser, 2009), this study focused only on fully online learning. The above-

mentioned variations were highlighted in the discussion about the background and the history of online learning. From the literature review, the researcher also discovered several factors influencing online learning, ranging from online facilitators' readiness for online facilitation (Howard et al., 2021), class size (Sorensen, 2014), course design (Martin et al., 2019), support (Pierce-Friedman & Wellner, 2020) and professional development (Adnan, 2018). All of these factors drive higher education institutions to incorporate online learning for, amongst others, increased access to education (McGee et al., 2017), flexibility (Daniel, 2016b), supporting the achievement of SDG4 (Silo & Ketlhoilwe, 2020) and responding to COVID-19 challenges (Maatuk et al., 2022).

In terms of the online education landscape, it was argued that online education is rapidly expanding (Tibingana-Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020). Part of the discussion focused on online learning in both developing and developed countries. In the USA alone there were more than six million students enrolled for online courses in 2016 (Lederman, 2018). In South Africa several universities, including the University of Johannesburg (Malan, 2020) and the University of Pretoria (University of Pretoria, 2020) have taken the initiative to offer fully online courses and are consistently expanding their offerings. However, e-Learning has not reached its full potential due to obstacles faced by the country, such as poor literacy and the digital divide (Pather & Booi, 2020). In light of the above-mentioned obstacles, it was shown that projects like the Free Public Wi-fi initiative and data-free internet services were implemented in an effort to address poor literacy levels and digital divide (Geerdts et al., 2016). In terms of online facilitation in fully online programmes, it was discovered that it requires adjustments to instructional methods (Simamora et al., 2020). The facilitator should encourage engagement and build a space that fosters a sense of belonging (Sharoff, 2019) and receive support from the faculty (Pierce-Friedman & Wellner, 2020).

Taking into consideration the factors that influence online facilitation, the skills facilitators need and the challenges experienced to create an engaging online environment, the Multimodal model for online education (Picciano, 2021) guided this study and served as a theoretical framework. The framework consists of eight elements: namely, content, social/emotional, dialectic/questioning, reflection, collaborative learning, evaluation, learning community and self-pace/independent study.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study adopted an interpretivism paradigm with the purpose of gaining insights into facilitating fully online programmes from the lecturer's point of view (Rehman & Alhartu, 2016). Since the researcher was interested in rich descriptions of the online lecturers' experiences, this study then adopted a qualitative (Amaratunga et al., 2002) case study (Gerring, 2006) approach. Purposively selected, the participants in this study were lecturers facilitating fully online programmes, namely the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management at one higher education institution. Data were collected using two instruments: an online survey and an online interview. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017) by following the two general steps suggested by Nieuwenhuis (2016), namely preparation of data and coding.

5.2 Addressing the research questions

The section below addresses the research questions by presenting the findings based on the analysis in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Factors that influence lecturers' experiences

The findings indicate that each of the eight elements of the framework positively impacted the lecturers' experiences with online facilitation. The participants acknowledged and valued the influence of all the framework's elements in the success of the online education environment. For example, the participants enjoyed delivering content to their online students using the Learning Management System. However, it is important to offer lecturers support and training. This finding is similar to Tuga et al. (2021) recommendation that it is essential to support the facilitators and provide training prior to designing and delivering content. By giving training to the participants, as also found by (Fischer et al., 2018), they were able to successfully offer their students social support through the "Coffee Shop" and "Facilitator Emergency Room" functions.

Various assessment techniques played a role in evaluating students' understanding of course content in the online environment, emphasising the importance of questioning (Liu, 2019). The Learning Management System allowed facilitators to use quizzes to test knowledge, open-ended questions in discussion forums to assess understanding of a topic and case study assignment questions to test application.

Collaborative learning was another factor that affected the lecturers' online facilitation experience. The majority of the participants enjoyed using this element in their online courses. Participants indicated that grouping students into different teams with the intention of giving them a task to complete collectively allowed them to learn from one another. This was useful, especially when students were from different contexts and backgrounds. The participants, however, mentioned that peer assessments (in pairs) elicited a better response from students than group activities (Ubaldo, 2021). The success of collaborative learning can possibly yield growth in a learning community and address the issue of geographical separation (Sumtsova et al., 2018). Understanding each participants' role in e-Learning, which includes the lecturer and student, is also essential for the success of a learning community. The facilitators played an important role in establishing their online learning community. Their primary function was to serve as a guide in the online learning environment, and this is consistent with what was found in a study conducted by Lave and Wenger (1991).

Additionally, having various members such as guest lecturers and the faculty present can also expand the learning community. The researcher learned from the findings that the majority of the participants enjoyed being members of the learning community. However, they were not entirely aware of what their roles entailed. It is crucial for lecturers to evaluate and keep track of the students' understanding after giving them tasks to complete. The researcher found that participants all followed the continuous assessment approach, which, in their opinion, stimulated participation. The participants also incorporated reflections as part of the online assessment activities. Reflection activities are crucial because they compel students to think critically about the content and how to apply it to their own work. Wain (2017) regards reflection as a daily activity of learning.

Students responded well to the self-paced nature of the online learning environment. Because the bulk of the students were working professionals, who had to be accommodated when setting the due dates for tasks, they valued the freedom offered by self-paced online learning. However, self-regulation is required for effective self-paced learning (Kuo et al., 2014a).

Another factor that influenced the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online programmes was the value of support. The value of support was featured in the

discussion of each one of the elements, demonstrating the continuous need of support through all phases of online facilitation. The researcher therefore suggests that support be considered as an additional element on the Multimodal model for online education.

5.2.2 Challenges faced by online facilitators

Despite the above-mentioned positive experiences, the facilitators' limited technology literacy caused them to encounter difficulties in the programme design phase. The lecturers also struggled with deciding how much information to include in their online modules since it was their first time facilitating online. Similar to Junus et al. (2021) findings, first-time online facilitators might experience low confidence levels. Their questioning techniques, as a result of inexperience, were occasionally unclear, resulting in students being unable to understand the topic at hand because they could not follow the online instructions. Since reflection practices were new to students, participants complained that students struggled to reflect critically about their learning.

The class sizes ranged from 100 to 1530 in these online modules. These high numbers had an influence on the social and emotional support that facilitators were able to provide. Providing emotional support was more challenging as compared to providing social support. The challenge was attributed to large class sizes and fluctuations in students' emotions. According to Jiang and Koo (2020), lecturers should be aware of the changes in the student's emotions and have suitable techniques in place to deal with them.

Facilitating hundreds of students resulted in facilitators having a lot of assignments to mark. Consequently, they opted to use automatically graded assessments which could potentially influence the quality of the assessments. Due to the students' varying schedules, it was difficult to accommodate everyone when collaborative activities were incorporated into online learning.

5.2.3 Methods to address challenges experienced

In light of the challenges outlined above, facilitators suggested the creation of engaging presentations that are brief and informative, in order to improve content. Clear instructions are essential when using questioning techniques and reflection

activities for students to fully understand what is expected from them. Not only are clear instructions relevant for questioning techniques and reflection activities, but they also communicate self-paced activities to avoid last minute excuses.

Participants recommended that collaborative learning tasks be kept to the minimum. This recommendation is similar to what was found in a study conducted by Seifert and Feliks (2019) who established that the activities should be wisely planned and less time-consuming. In addition to collaborative activities, other assessment activities, such as quizzes, can be added to grade assessments automatically in the Learning Management System and thereby lessen the workload associated with marking. Seen as both a challenge and a recommendation, questions must be set in such a way that students cannot easily copy from one another. Participants also suggested that in order to improve the ability to provide social and emotional support, as well as the learning community, interaction must be stimulated amongst students. In addition, guests can be invited to present short lectures to widen the experience of the students.

5.2.4 Experiences of online facilitation

The findings show that the lecturers had positive experiences in all the eight elements of the framework when they facilitated fully online programmes in higher education. The researcher discovered that although the lecturers encountered challenges at the beginning of their online facilitation journey, such as facilitating fully online modules for the first time and using new techniques for assessments, they became familiar with online facilitation, received guidance and support from the learning designer and delivered what was expected from them. As affirmed by P5, “having the online facilitation experience, it’s brilliant…I feel very comfortable doing it.” The experience made the lecturers more aware of their teaching strategies and how students respond to them. The facilitation process allowed the lecturers to grow and develop by becoming flexible in the facilitation methods and meeting students’ expectations in the online environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that the overall experience that the lecturers had when facilitating fully online programmes in higher education was pleasant and beneficial.

The section below reflects on the lessons learned from this study.

5.3 Reflection on the lessons learned

Since the researcher was interested in the lecturers' experience when facilitating fully online modules in higher education, this study adopted a qualitative case study design because the researcher intended to obtain rich detailed responses to the primary and secondary research questions. Adopting a qualitative case study design was a good decision because the researcher was able to collect insightful, rich data as intended. The researcher could have gathered more data if a quantitative approach was chosen, but this study would not have yielded the rich, in-depth results that the researcher was looking for. Instead, the rich, qualitative data were obtained through interviews with the participants. Eight lecturers who facilitate the fully online Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health and the Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management were purposively selected and made up the sample of this study. While the class sizes in these programmes range from 100 to 1530, it is worth noting that these two programmes represent the university's only fully online offerings. For this reason, all the facilitators presenting these programmes were invited to participate in this study, and eight responded positively.

The Multimodal model for online education, developed by Picciano (2021), served as the theoretical foundation for this study. As this model encompasses the factors that relate to online facilitation, the researcher was able to develop the questions for both the data collection instruments around the eight elements of the model. Having a framework to guide the research helped the researcher to structure the research by focusing on the eight elements of the Multimodal model for online education only.

In this study, an online survey and online interview were used as data collection instruments. From the online survey the researcher was able to learn more about the participants' backgrounds through the open-ended questions. The researcher learned that using two data collection instruments was better than utilising just one. Using two data collection instruments allowed for triangulation and confirmation of the results (Breitmayer et al., 1993). Furthermore, utilising two instruments also allowed for the collection of a wider variety of data, providing a more comprehensive knowledge of the topic being explored. The data from the online interviews confirmed the results of the Likert scale survey, contributing to the credibility of the data. In addition, the richness of the data was enhanced as the researcher could ask participants to explain

their responses during the online interview, seeking clarification that relates to the framework's elements measured through the Likert scale survey.

Using the thematic analysis approach to prepare and code the data helped with maintaining consistency by, concentrating on the eight components of the framework that functioned as the key themes in this study and guided the reporting of shared or common experiences of the participants. Overall, the research methods adopted worked well and assisted with achieving the intended objectives of this study.

In this study, lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education were explored. The responses of the participants were not in any way influenced when data were collected. Individual online interviews were conducted with each of the consenting participants. In that setting, one may remark that this arrangement allowed participants to carefully consider their responses without being affected by those of others, as data was not collected through focus group interviews. Groupthink and conformity are considered to be two of the disadvantages of collecting data through focus group interviews (Carey & Smith, 1994). Additionally, in order for the researcher to collect data that is accurate and free of prepared responses, the interview questions were not disclosed to the participants prior to the online interview.

Although some of the participants had previously worked with the researcher, their responses were subjective to their context. The interpretations of the findings were analysed in an honest manner. The facilitators were unbiased in their discussion of both positive and negative experiences when facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. The questions of the online survey and interview were not one-sided. As this study focused on two faculties from one university only, future studies could explore the facilitation of fully online programmes offered by faculties from other higher education institutions. Overall, the research process of this study ensured trustworthiness and consistency.

Through the journey of exploring the lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education, the researcher realised the need of consistency in a research process. Consistency played a crucial role in linking the chapters and connecting the content of the study. The Multimodal model for online education assisted in ensuring that the research remained focused in exploring lecturers'

experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. Since the theoretical framework guided this study throughout, it helped in maintaining coherence and consistency when data were collected and analysed.

Considering the research gaps that were identified and the findings, this study provided information that is worth considering by stakeholders such as learning designers, higher education institutions, researchers and lecturers planning or currently facilitating fully online programmes. The researcher's growth, comprehension of academic writing and exploration of a topic have all benefited from the research process of this study.

Although this study provided insightful information, there were limitations, which are discussed below.

5.4 Limitations

While this study generated insightful data, qualitative studies have some drawbacks. The one limitation identified in this study is that the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population because of the small sample size. The exploration was limited to just two programmes, focusing solely on one higher education institution.

This chapter concludes with a number of key recommendations for future research studies that can build on the findings of this study and possibly further deepen the insights of lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education.

5.5 Recommendations

Since all eight elements of the framework (Picciano, 2021) were confirmed to influence the lecturers' experiences during fully online facilitation, learning designers should take all of them into consideration when preparing lecturers for online facilitation. In addition, a new element, namely support, featured in the discussion of each one of the elements, demonstrating the continuous need of support through all phases of online facilitation. The researcher recommends that support be considered as an additional element of the Multimodal model for online education. Learning designers, too, should take this into consideration so that they can support the online facilitation process (Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2020).

Although the overall experience was positive, the participants did experience challenges discussed before and also suggested how these challenges could be resolved. It was encouraging to see that as facilitators became familiar with online facilitation, and received support, their confidence increased. Based on this experience and the optimism of the lecturers, the researcher recommends the following:

Voluntary continuous professional development workshops for online facilitators focusing on technology (for example, using the Learning Management System), course design (for example, what content to include and how, as well as how to design automatically graded assessments), teaching strategies (for example, how to use questioning techniques and reflection activities) and how to handle large groups. The support element can be covered with the above recommendation.

For future studies, it is recommended that researchers look at other fully online programmes in undergraduate and postgraduate studies. It is further recommended that future research focus on exploring other higher education institutions that offer online programmes.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of lecturers facilitating fully online programmes in higher education. During the research, a gap was identified concerning the lack of discussion about lecturers' online facilitation experiences. To assist the researcher to fully comprehend the topic, Chapter 2 focused on reviewing existing literature in the field.

The Multimodal model for online education served as this study's theoretical foundation and provided overall research guidance. The findings show that the framework's elements significantly influenced the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education. Although the lecturers faced challenges during the process, they were able to overcome them through the suggested solutions. In conclusion, this study shows that the lecturers had predominantly positive experiences that were influenced by the elements of the Multimodal model for online education.

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Appendix A – Survey questions

Section A: Screening question

1.	Have you ever facilitated a fully online programme in higher education?	Yes	No

If you have answered No to the above questions, please do not complete the survey.

Section B: Questions on experience

1. How long have you been facilitating online?

_____

2. Which online programme(s) did you facilitate?

_____

3. Do you have any formal qualification(s) to facilitate online?

_____

4. How many students did you facilitate in an online environment?

Section C: Statements measuring facilitators' online teaching experience

Please read the following statements and indicate with an "√" the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements, on a scale of 1 to 5, where **1 = Strongly disagree** and **5 = Strongly agree.**	**Strongly disagree → Strongly agree**				
Experience					
I enjoyed facilitating online programmes/courses	1	2	3	4	5
Content					
I enjoyed delivering content to online students	1	2	3	4	5
The course/learning management systems helped in delivering content in online learning	1	2	3	4	5
Social/Emotional					
I provided my online students with sufficient social/emotional support	1	2	3	4	5
Self-paced					
I enjoyed facilitating a fully online programme where learning is self-paced	1	2	3	4	5
My online students responded well to the self-paced approach	1	2	3	4	5
Dialectic/Questioning					
I enjoyed using questioning techniques when facilitating fully online programmes	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluation					
I enjoyed evaluating students in an online learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
The forms of assessments used for evaluation were effective	1	2	3	4	5

Collaborative Learning						
	I liked using collaborative learning approach in my online classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Reflection						
	I liked utilizing reflections in my online classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Learning community						
	I understood the influence that I had as part of the learning community	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B – Interview questions

Section A: Screening question

1.	Have you ever facilitated a fully online programme in higher education?	Yes	No

If participant respond with a No, do not continue with the Interview.

Section B: Questions on experience

1. Please share your before and after experience of online facilitation.

2. How would you describe your experience of delivering content to students in an online course?

3. How would you describe your experience in relation to the social/emotional support you provided to your online students?

4. How would you describe facilitating an online course where learning is self- paced?

5. How would you describe your experience regarding questioning techniques in online facilitation?

6. How would you describe your experience of evaluating students in online education?

7. How would you describe your experience from a facilitator point of view regarding collaborative learning?

8. How would you describe your experience regarding online teaching approaches focusing on reflections?

9. How would you describe your experience as being part of the learning community in an online course?

Section C: Questions on factors influencing lecturers' experience of facilitating fully online courses

1. Name positive factors that contributed to your online facilitation experience.

2. Content

2.1 Describe how you designed your content to make it suitable for online learning?

2.2 What are the platforms you used to deliver content?

2.3 Do you think the nature of the content influences facilitation in an online environment? Answer with a Yes/No and provide a reason for your response.

3. Social/Emotional

3.1 How did you provide social/emotional support to your online students?

3.2 What are the mediums that you used to provide the social/emotional support?

3.3 Do you think this form of communication influenced the student in any social and/or emotional way?

4. Self-paced

4.1 Do you think facilitating in a self-paced online environment is effective? Why?

4.2 How did your students respond to being taught in an online environment?

5. Dialectic/Questioning

5.1 What are the dialectic/questioning techniques you used?

5.2 Do you think these techniques where beneficial? Explain your answer.

6. Evaluation/ Assessment

6.1 How did you evaluate your students?

6.2 Do you think this form of assessment was effective? Explain your answer.

6.3 Do you think that by using this form of evaluation you maintained the standards required for the qualification?

7. Collaborative learning

7.1 Did you make use of collaborative learning in your online classroom?

7.2 If yes, why did you use collaborative learning?

7.3 How effective was collaborative learning?

7.4 If No, what were the reasons for not using collaborative learning?

8. Reflection

8.1 Did you include reflection in your module?

8.2 If Yes, how did you use reflection in your online module?

8.3 What is the value of reflection in online courses?

8.4 If no, what were the reasons for not using reflection?

9. Learning community

9.1 What was your role as an online facilitator within a learning community?

9.2 How do you feel you influenced the online learning environment for your students?

Section D: Questions on challenges

1. What challenges did you encounter during your online facilitation in terms of content design and delivery?

2. Did you face challenges regarding the social/emotional interactions with your students in an online environment? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what could have contributed towards not facing any challenges?

3. Did you and your students face challenges regarding self-paced learning? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what could have contributed towards not facing any challenges?

4. Did you encounter any challenges relating to your dialectic/questioning techniques? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what could have contributed towards not facing any challenges?

5. Did you encounter challenges relating to the way you evaluated your students? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what could have contributed towards not facing any challenges?

6. If you included collaborative learning in your online course, did you experience any challenges? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what could have contributed towards not facing any challenges?

7. If you included reflections in your online course, did you experience any challenges? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what could have contributed towards not facing any challenges?

8. Did you encounter challenges while facilitating online? If yes, share your challenges. If no, what is it that was put in place to alleviate those challenges?

9. How did these challenges impact your online experience?

Section E: Questions on how to address challenges

1. What are the systems put in place to monitor and reduce challenges?

2. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to content design and delivery when facilitating online?

3. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to social/emotional interactions when facilitating online?

4. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to self-paced learning when facilitating online?

5. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to dialectic/questioning when facilitating online?

6. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to evaluation when facilitating online?

7. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to collaboration when facilitating online?

8. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to reflections when facilitating online?

9. What is it that you would like to improve or change relating to learning community when facilitating online?

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Appendix C – Consent letters

Facilitator

University of Pretoria

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria. Part of the requirements for the awarding of this degree is the successful completion of a significant research project in the field of education.

The title of my proposed research study is **"Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education".**

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate lecturers' experiences by identifying the factors that influence facilitating fully online programmes. Furthermore, the proposed study will identify the challenges lecturers face when teaching fully online courses and how they can be addressed.

You are hereby invited to participate in this research project, which aims to understand: What are the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education?

Below is the scope and responsibility of your participation. To gather information for this research, I request permission to interview you as a lecturer who has facilitated a fully online programme and participate in an online survey that will not take longer than 15 minutes. The interview should take no longer than 40 minutes and will be conducted virtually. The interview, with your permission, will be recorded to ensure that accurate information is captured.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Please understand that the decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary and that permission for your participation will also be protected by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Please also note that each individual's participation in the study will be completely voluntarily and will in no way either advantage or disadvantage them. Each participant will be free, at any stage during the process up to and including the stage at which they authenticate the transcript of their interview, to withdraw their consent to participate, in which case their participation will end immediately without any negative consequences. Any and all data collected from them up to that point in the study will then be discarded.

All the information obtained during the research study will be treated confidentially, with not even the Department of Higher Education and Training having access to the raw data obtained from the interviews. At no time will either you as an individual or your faculty be mentioned by name or be allowed to be identified by any means in the research report.

This research study presents a unique opportunity for you and your faculty to get involved in the process of research aimed at investigating lecturers' experiences on facilitating fully online programmes at higher education. If you decide to participate, kindly complete the consent form at the end of this letter.

Thanking you for your consideration in this research study.

Yours in service of education,

T.P Molemone		
.....	.....	.....
Miss Tshepang Molemone	Dr Kimera Moodley	Dr Mari van Wyk
Student Researcher	Supervisor	Co- Supervisor
University of Pretoria	University of Pretoria	University of Pretoria
U16043503@tuks.co.za	kimera.moodley@up.ac.za	mari.vanwyk@up.ac.za

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Faculty of Education

LETTER of CONSENT

Facilitator AS PARTICIPANT

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ENTITLED:

"Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education"

I, _____

_____ hereby voluntarily and willingly agree to participate in the above-mentioned study introduced and explained to me by Tshepang Molemone, currently a student enrolled for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria.

I further declare that I understand, as was explained to me by the researcher, the aim, scope, purpose, possible consequences and benefits, and methods of collecting information proposed by the researcher, as well as the means by which the researcher will attempt to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the information she collects.

_____ _____

Full name Signature

_____

Date

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

The Dean of Economics and Management Sciences
University of Pretoria

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria. Part of the requirements for the awarding of this degree is the successful completion of a significant research project in the field of education.

The title of my proposed research study is **"Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education".**

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate lecturers' experiences by identifying the factors that influence facilitating fully online programmes. Furthermore, the proposed study will identify the challenges lecturers face when teaching fully online courses and how they can be addressed.

Your faculty is hereby invited to participate in this research project, which aims to understand: What are the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education?

Below is the scope and responsibility of your faculty participation. To gather information, I require to approach the Public Management Sciences lecturers that have facilitated fully online programmes with an individual invitation to participate. Those who do agree to participate will be interviewed and complete a survey that will not take longer than 15 minutes to share their online facilitation experiences. The interview should take no longer than 40 minutes and will be conducted virtually. The interview, with your permission, will be recorded to ensure that accurate information is captured.

Please understand that the decision for your faculty to participate is completely voluntary and will also be protected by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Please also note that each

individual's participation in the study will be completely voluntarily and will in no way either advantage or disadvantage them.
Each participant will be free, at any stage during the process up to and including the stage at which they authenticate the transcript of their interview, to withdraw their consent to participate, in which case their participation will end immediately without any negative consequences. Any and all data collected from them up to that point in the study will then be discarded.

All the information obtained during the research study will be treated confidentially, with not even the Department of Higher Education and Training having access to the raw data obtained from the interviews. At no time will either your faculty or any of the individual participants be mentioned by name or be allowed to be identified by any means in the research report.

At the end of the research study, you will be provided with a copy of the research report containing both the findings of the study and recommendations. This research study presents a unique opportunity for your faculty to get involved in the process of research aimed at investigating lecturers' experiences on facilitating fully online programmes at higher education. If you decide to allow your faculty to participate. Kindly complete the consent form at the end of this letter.

Thanking you for your consideration in this research study.

Yours in service of education,

T.P Molemone		
.....	.....	.....
Miss Tshepang Molemone	Dr Kimera Moodley	Dr Mari van Wyk
Student Researcher	Supervisor	Co- Supervisor
University of Pretoria	University of Pretoria	University of Pretoria
U16043503@tuks.co.za	kimera.moodley@up.ac.za	mari.vanwyk@up.ac.za

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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

LETTER of CONSENT

Faculty AS PARTICIPANT

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ENTITLED:
"Lectures' experiences on facilitating fully online programmes in higher education"

I, _____ the dean of _____ hereby voluntarily and willingly agree to allow my faculty to participate in the above-mentioned study introduced and explained to me by Tshepang Molemone, currently a student enrolled for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria.

I further declare that I understand, as was explained to me by the researcher, the aim, scope, purpose, possible consequences and benefits, and methods of collecting information proposed by the researcher, as well as the means by which the researcher will attempt to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the information she collects.

_____ _____

Full name Signature

_____

Date

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

The Dean of Health Sciences

University of Pretoria

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria. Part of the requirements for the awarding of this degree is the successful completion of a significant research project in the field of education.

The title of my proposed research study is **"Lecturers' experiences of facilitating fully online programmes in higher education".**

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate lecturers' experiences by identifying the factors that influence facilitating fully online programmes. Furthermore, the proposed study will identify the challenges lecturers face when teaching fully online courses and how they can be addressed.

Your faculty is hereby invited to participate in this research project, which aims to understand: What are the lecturers' experiences when facilitating fully online modules in higher education?

Below is the scope and responsibility of your faculty participation. To gather information, I require to approach the Public Health Sciences lecturers that have facilitated fully online programmes with an individual invitation to participate. Those who do agree to participate will be interviewed and complete a survey that will not take longer than 15 minutes to share their online facilitation experiences. The interview should take no longer than 40 minutes and will be conducted virtually. The interview, with your permission, will be recorded to ensure that accurate information is captured.

Please understand that the decision for your faculty to participate is completely voluntary and will also be protected by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Please also note that each

individual's participation in the study will be completely voluntarily and will in no way either advantage or disadvantage them.

Each participant will be free, at any stage during the process up to and including the stage at which they authenticate the transcript of their interview, to withdraw their consent to participate, in which case their participation will end immediately without any negative consequences. Any and all data collected from them up to that point in the study will then be discarded.

All the information obtained during the research study will be treated confidentially, with not even the Department of Higher Education and Training having access to the raw data obtained from the interviews. At no time will either your faculty or any of the individual participants be mentioned by name or be allowed to be identified by any means in the research report.

At the end of the research study, you will be provided with a copy of the research report containing both the findings of the study and recommendations. This research study presents a unique opportunity for your faculty to get involved in the process of research aimed at investigating lecturers' experiences on facilitating fully online programmes at higher education. If you decide to allow your faculty to participate. Kindly complete the consent form at the end of this letter.

Thanking you for your consideration in this research study.

Yours in service of education,

T.P Molemone		
.....	.....	.....
Miss Tshepang Molemone	Dr Kimera Moodley	Dr Mari van Wyk
Student Researcher	Supervisor	Co- Supervisor
University of Pretoria	University of Pretoria	University of Pretoria
U16043503@tuks.co.za	kimera.moodley@up.ac.za	mari.vanwyk@up.ac.za

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Faculty of Education

LETTER of CONSENT

Faculty AS PARTICIPANT

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ENTITLED:

"Lectures' experiences on facilitating fully online programmes in higher education"

I, _____ the dean of

_____ hereby voluntarily and willingly agree to allow my faculty to participate in the above-mentioned study introduced and explained to me by Tshepang Molemone, currently a student enrolled for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria.

I further declare that I understand, as was explained to me by the researcher, the aim, scope, purpose, possible consequences and benefits, and methods of collecting information proposed by the researcher, as well as the means by which the researcher will attempt to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the information she collects.

_____ _____

Full name Signature

_____

Date