

## **Students' experiences of e learning during Covid-19 in a selected State University in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

The outbreak of Covid-19 and its declaration as a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) forced universities in Zimbabwe and beyond to abandon the usual face to face teaching and learning after national lockdowns were instituted by governments to curb the spread of the deadly pandemic. E-learning became the new normal. This study explored the e-learning experiences of university students from different socio-economic backgrounds during the national lockdown in Zimbabwe. The case study research design which derives from the qualitative research approach and interpretivist paradigm was used. Data were gathered from fourteen purposively sampled Master of Education students through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. It was established that students from poor backgrounds had challenges in accessing the Google Classroom online teaching platform that was recommended by the university because they could not afford data bundles which were very expensive. Also, a number of students from both affluent and poor backgrounds lacked meaningful knowledge on how to use Google Classroom e-learning platform as they had only received a one day training before universities were instructed to close. Connectivity challenges also affected all students across the social divide, leading to the adoption of WhatsApp as an e-learning platform which could be accessed even when network connectivity was limited. Due to these and other problems, e-learning was viewed as a preserve for the rich and computer literate while those from poor backgrounds remained out of the google classes due to lack of resources. It was recommended that universities support e-learning through proper training of students and provision of data to those who cannot afford it.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, e-learning, Google Classroom, lockdown, pandemic