

More than just Zoom: How to unlock e-learning for varsities

By [Belinda Liebenberg](#), issued by [Optimi](#)

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Over the last 12 months, South African schools have had to dramatically change their approach to teaching, with e-learning becoming an integral part of their daily lives.



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At our universities, the same trends have applied – albeit in different ways, across different institutions.

Some universities have adapted better than others. But if one takes a step back, this could be a moment that moves our tertiary education space forward, resulting in improved student performance and greater access.

Here are three key thoughts around why this could be the case.

Tech-savvy students drive change

Many universities in South Africa have digital tools at hand already. Typically, they will have a learning management system (LMS) such as Moodle or Canvas. They'll also either use a tool like Zoom or BigBlueButton to carry out video calls and lectures.

What's interesting is that students who use these tools are already among the most tech-savvy yet – with the vast majority having grown up with the internet.

Therefore, keeping these students' attention will also be more challenging than ever. While a lecturer hosts a Zoom call, a student could be playing *Candy Crush* in the background.

This is why today's modern lecturer needs to think of innovative ways to keep their students engaged and participating. This is good pressure as it enhances the need for more interesting education delivery.

Combine this approach with the fact that lectures can be recorded, and you have a scenario where students are more encouraged to go over their course material and attain higher retention rates.



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Refined assessment

Technology can be a distraction but, if used correctly, it can also be an enhancing force that unlocks a student's true potential.

In addition to an LMS, universities should look to implement pre-and-post-assessment technologies.

These types of tools can be used, for instance, at the beginning of an economics lecture to ascertain students' level of understanding of concepts such as short selling.

It can take the form of a quick quiz, and if the results indicate that a high number of students lack understanding, then the lecturer can tail back his or her approach.

After completing the lecture, a post assessment can then determine whether the class has subsequently grasped the concept.

If used effectively, lecturers won't have to solely rely on exams or tests to determine the level of understanding among their students.

This forms part of what's known as adaptive learning, and it is something that can become particularly important for state universities that have certain requirements regarding throughput rates.

As has been the case for years, state universities are provided with funding by the government on the basis of whether students are taking reasonable times to complete their studies.

Universities are paid out as long as, for example, four-year degree students finish their studies in six years or less. Having a better performance system – in between lectures, exams and tests – can dramatically help universities in this regard.

Greater access

A final aspect to consider when it comes to faster technology adoption in our universities is that it opens up our institutions to greater access.

A pressing issue that our nation faces is that more young people than ever before are looking to enter the tertiary education system, but there is a lack of physical capacity for them.

By embracing e-learning, our universities can open up their institutions faster to more learners, without the requirement of having them physically on campus.

This can also save money for families as it means that many students won't have to migrate to cities to complete their studies.

Many major universities around the world are already doing this, and local universities will have to keep pace to retain top

talent.

All in all, this can have a positive net impact on our nation and result in a richer university experience.

- ***Belinda Liebenberg is head of implementation and support at [Optimi Classroom](#), a leading education provider in South Africa that provides education technology solutions and training for the likes of schools, educators and tertiary education institutions.***



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