

Educational institutions must embrace the new digital reality

By [Robert Speed](#)

6 May 2020

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is having a profound and indelible effect on all aspects of society, sweeping in disruptive changes to the way we live, work and interact with each other. Adopting a suitable and robust online learning strategy is key to maintaining academic continuity for institutions of higher learning.



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One of the key areas that has been impacted most noticeably worldwide is education, with many countries – including South Africa – opting to close educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the Coronavirus.

The scale of this shutdown has been monumental, with Unesco stating that thus far some 188 countries have implemented nationwide closures, which impacted more than 91% of the world's student population.

Much like the business world that has been forced to innovate to stay afloat, educational facilities across the globe are accelerating their digital transformation initiatives to mitigate the impact of the closures and facilitate the continuity of education through remote learning.

This is where an education technology and services company such as Blackboard can play a crucial role in supporting higher education institutions in South Africa to quickly transition to digital teaching and learning modalities, as they implement their Covid-19 contingency plans.

Ensuring student success

The ultimate mandate of universities is to ensure “student success”, which means equipping students with the required skills, as well as providing them with the ability to graduate timeously. In a time of crisis, where normal learning can no longer be sustained, online platforms play a central role in bolstering the student experience and ensuring positive outcomes.

The biggest challenge facing universities that fail to respond quickly enough to the need to go online is that they can potentially be putting academic continuity at risk. Hence, we have been working closely with them.

We strive to assist our clients across the globe to address their most urgent challenges, such as the quick deployment of virtual classrooms, training faculty and academic staff to effectively leverage teaching and learning technologies and ensuring that all digital course content is engaging, accessible and inclusive for all students.

No silver bullet

But it is important to note that this is not merely about deploying technology for the sake of technology. There is no single software deployment that is a silver bullet for online learning. Instead, a successfully implemented solution must be specifically suited to the needs of both the student and teacher constituencies.

For a learning management system (LMS) to have an impact, it needs to be configured to support a client’s specific learning requirements and be integrated with their ecosystem so that it becomes a holistic experience that is stable, pedagogically sound and scalable for future growth.

Institutions of higher learning are realising that education will never be the same again post Covid-19 and online teaching will become the new normal.

At the same time, they are also recognising that successful online transitions are only the first steps and thus we look forward to continuing our long-standing partnerships with some of the country’s most forward-thinking institutions.

It is our duty to further support them as they unlock all the new possibilities that a cloud-based approach brings to teaching and learning, as together we can all achieve more.

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