

Covid-19: Interdisciplinary Explorations of Impacts on Higher Education

Editors:

Tennyson Mgutshini, Kunle Oparinde and Vaneshree Govender

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POSTGRADUATE TRAINING AND SUPERVISION DURING AND POST THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Have universities
addressed challenges and
seized opportunities?**

Urmilla Bob, Suveshnee Munien, Amanda Gumede and Rivoni Gounden

Introduction

Postgraduate education is critical for the training of the next generation of researchers, as outlined by Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2015) and Manyike (2017). Several concerns have been raised nationally and within higher education institutions about the state of postgraduate training in South Africa with the quality of graduates, throughput rates, supervision capacity, the preparedness of students to undertake postgraduate degrees, state of research infrastructure, etc. (Academy of Science of South Africa, 2018; Cloete et al., 2015; National Planning Commission [NPC], 2013). Research is vital to inform evidence-based practices and responses. The Covid-19 pandemic has, in several ways, further exposed the challenges that universities face in relation to postgraduate training and supervision, which this chapter examines. Additionally, the pandemic has reinforced inequalities and inefficiencies that characterise South Africa's higher education landscape. Thus, it is imperative that research examines Covid-19's impacts on postgraduate training and supervision. In the context of this study, postgraduate training and supervision are widespread global occurrences in the higher education sector. While numerous challenges with postgraduate education have been identified as indicated in the South African context, the Covid-19 pandemic is a type of disruption that has not been experienced previously in terms of the scope and nature of the impacts,

intensity and unpredictability. Social constructivism is, in this context, a useful framework to reflect on observations and experiences. It is a theoretical lens which is embedded in adopting a critical stance to examine taken-for-granted or common phenomena that challenges the notion of objective knowledge construction and focuses on experiences and differences. Two of the authors are supervisors, and two of the authors are doctoral students. The experiences and reflective stance of the authors also provide insights pertinent to the focus of this study.

Social constructivism, according to Dreyer (2017) and McKenzie and Roodenburg (2017), is a theory of knowing that is suspicious of categorisation and assuming that phenomena are experienced or results in similar impacts across a populace, in this instance postgraduate students and supervisors. They specifically underscore the importance of reflective practice, which the authors undertake in this study. Social constructivism also adopts the position that knowledge is socially constructed or sustained by social processes and interactions (Aitken, 2019; Mariguddi, 2020). Mariguddi (2020:8) states that social constructivism is a theory that “acknowledges that social interactions influence how an individual interprets various pieces of information and experiences”, which in the context of this study includes the views and experiences of the authors in their respective roles as academics/supervisors and postgraduate students. Additionally, social constructivism, as indicated by Mertkan and Bayrakli (2018), notes the importance of considering power dynamics and specific contexts associated with social interactions. The manner in which individuals perceive and view the world are influenced by their social lenses, which include socio-cultural attributes including gender, population group, educational level and class. In the postgraduate context, disciplinary background, supervisor, etc. are influential. Thus, for the purposes of this research, institutional responses, student and supervisor capacity to deal with change, as well as student-supervisor interactions, are among the aspects examined pertaining to postgraduate training and supervision during the Covid-19 pandemic and how these reflections can inform future practices.

This chapter primarily adopts a desktop study approach. The key secondary information sourced relate to postgraduate statistics that reflect trends and critical issues in the South African context. Specifically, information from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is used in this regard. Additionally, an advanced Google Scholar search was used with various filters including ‘postgraduate education and Covid-19’, ‘postgraduate education in South Africa’ and ‘challenges faced by postgraduate students’. Relevant and the most current publications were used to inform the discussions. Thus, a purposive sampling approach was adopted to undertake the desktop study.

The next section contextualises the higher education landscape in South Africa, focusing on postgraduate education and supervision. Thereafter, shifts in postgraduate training and supervision in response to the Covid-19 pandemic disruptions are discussed, followed by reflections on undertaking research and supervision when home-based. Recommendations to improve postgraduate supervision and training post-pandemic are then presented, which is a main contribution of the study. Finally, concluding remarks are forwarded.

Contextualising the higher education landscape in South Africa: Focus on postgraduate considerations

The higher education landscape is highly differentiated and, more than two decades on, continues to reflect apartheid constructions of advantaged and disadvantaged universities, with the former being historically white (including those that have been recently merged) and urban-based institutions (Cloete et al., 2015; NPC, 2013). The NPC (2013) further states that despite these differences, the entire system has been bogged down with administrative challenges, quality concerns and the inability to transform. Lessing and Schulze's (2002) assessment of postgraduate supervision and academic support in South Africa reveals that close to two decades later, the system remains mostly unchanged today. They assert that universities faced challenges of transformation, increasing numbers of disadvantaged students, low completion rates, and concerns pertaining to the quality of postgraduate education (including inadequate/ineffective supervision). Similar assertions are noted by ASSAf (2018), Cloete et al. (2015) and Pillay (2019), with the South African government itself in the NPC (2013) characterising the quality of universities in the country as being mid-level performers in terms of knowledge production, low throughput and high dropout rates, and insufficient capacity (including supervision capacity) to produce the required levels of skills. The NPC (2013) further notes that the sector continues to reflect historical inequities and distortions, and is under considerable strain with enrolments increasing without concomitant increases in funding, insufficient numbers and underprepared academics, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, equipment shortages, and administrative challenges. Furthermore, ASSAf (2018) and Rogan and Reynolds (2016) state that a major concern in South Africa is the unemployability of South African graduates. Resource constraints are likely to worsen as funding is shifting to curb the spread of the virus and address direct Covid-19 related health and economic impacts, which will further constrain the higher education system in South Africa.

The DHET's (2020a) latest research outputs report (based on 2018 publications) indicates that out of the 1 085 568 students enrolled in public higher education institutions in South Africa, 61 096 (5.6%) were registered for masters degrees and 23 650 (2.2%) for doctoral studies. Statistics South Africa (2019) states that a large and increasing proportion of students at South African public universities are foreigners from Africa, from 4.3% (25 039) in 2000 to 5.8% (56 074) in 2016. Additionally, DHET (2020a) shows that 63.1% of the 2019 enrolments were through contact mode with the rest enrolled through the distance mode of learning. These statistics reveal that most students are acclimatised to contact-based learning while, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, universities are forced to transition to online/virtual/remote learning, including postgraduate training and supervision, with many students and supervisors not being previously exposed to this approach to teaching and supervision. DHET (2020b) also indicates that in 2018, among the South African public universities, only 48% of academics had doctoral degrees ranging from 13.2% at Walter Sisulu University to 69.6% at the University of Pretoria. This has severe implications for postgraduate supervision and also reflects the inadequacies of supervisory capacity in South Africa and inequalities in the higher education system. It is important to note that most academics with doctoral degrees are emerging and black (at lecturer and senior lecturer levels) with lower levels of research productivity in relation to both publications, as well as the graduation of masters and doctoral students (DHET, 2015; Sadiq, Barnes, Price, Gumede & Morrell, 2019).

Teferra (2020) asserts that South African higher education institutions are deemed to be more stable, diverse, well-endowed, and comprehensive than their counterparts on the continent, noting that some South African institutions dominate the rankings lists. Teferra (2020:239) indicates, however, that South African universities reflect the racist and systematic discriminatory practices of the past, with legacies continuing "to be felt and manifested in the higher education system in a number of ways" with the system facing "multiple systemic challenges, structural shortcomings and frequent strikes and crises - largely around issues of access, quality, funding, race and decolonisation". Mohamedbhai (2020) cautions that the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic will destabilise higher education in Africa with serious consequences at a time when the continent is investing substantial efforts to transform and improve this sector.

Cloete et al. (2015), Manyike (2017), Mutula (2011) and Sadiq et al. (2019) note that effective postgraduate supervision is a concern at universities globally, which are even more disconcerting in development contexts such as South Africa where many students study part-time (even if registered as full-time students), resource constraints are evident, supervisory capacity is lacking (primarily because of younger

academics who lack the necessary experience) and where there is increasing demands by universities (as a result of government pressure linked to subsidies) to increase postgraduate student numbers (although throughput challenges are straining the system). Mutala (2011) asserts explicitly that some South African universities are characterised by inexperienced supervisors, supervisors training in research areas that varied from their specialisations, and the lack of research expertise.

Cloete et al. (2015) highlight a range of strategies from various sources (including government, universities, academics, and agencies/organisations involved in the higher education sector) being advocated to improve postgraduate education in South Africa. These include the need for increased synergies and collaboration, quality considerations, adequate resourcing of students and research activities, developing supervisory capacity, and embracing alternative modes of delivery (including online learning which has now become the norm).

Shifts in postgraduate training and supervision in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

The initial lockdown caused significant changes within university communities. In relation to postgraduate research, most studies have been postponed, and others modified to desktop-based research; however, there is a need to carefully examine the quality of research that is being conducted under these conditions. Laboratory and field-based research came to an abrupt halt with the restrictions limiting these types of research, with only Covid-19 approved studies permitted. The focus for many students and supervisors shifted to undertaking literature reviews and data analysis, if some or all of the primary data was collected. Master's students still in the process of formulating their proposals were advised (by supervisors and in some cases university ethics committees) to consider desktop studies, given the shorter length of master's compared to doctoral studies, and that key components of doctoral level research are to contribute to knowledge in a specific field/area and demonstrate methodological competence. The varied responses reinforce the importance of being sensitive to differences, as noted in relation to adopting social constructivism. Four months on, and in the current context of the rise in the number of infections and deaths associated with the virus; universities, supervisors, and postgraduate students are realising that the disruptions are unlikely to end in the near future. Foreign students will not be allowed to re-enter the country, domestic travel restrictions and social distancing protocols will continue, and although some level of re-opening universities has started at Risk Level 3, the requirements of the number of staff and students that are permitted on campuses will result in prioritisation of who should be allowed to be at universities physically. For example, students undertaking laboratory-based research are groups that have been prioritised.

The restrictions on the number of researchers permitted in the laboratory and other social distancing protocols, however, will impact on the time taken to complete the research, which is already a significant challenge in South Africa as noted by Cloete et al. (2015) and Manyike (2017). Additionally, concerns are raised that the challenges experienced to procure laboratory materials and equipment, often sourced from other countries, may delay research. Because of the disruptions and restrictions, some students may need to change their research topics altogether. The changes in topics, research design and data collection approaches all require ethical approval. Students and supervisors are required to understand processes that need to be followed for ethical approval and amendments during this time, which can be a difficult and time-consuming process at many universities that still rely on paper-based ethical approval processes and do not have online application systems. Navigating these administrative procedures (together with registration, accessing funding, getting the necessary support to go online, etc.) can be extremely frustrating for both students and supervisors since, as indicated earlier, administrative inefficiencies and challenges characterise many South African universities. Dealing with bureaucratic, administrative processes that have not adapted to the “new normal” are likely to be even more overwhelming for students who are not based near or at universities (when partial re-opening commences), including students who are foreign and are residing in rural areas, which reinforce the importance of considering differing contexts as outlined in relation to the theoretical framework used.

Covid-19 restrictions have brought to the fore the ability of postgraduate students to conduct and carry out research remotely and independently, emphasising their theoretical knowledge and analytical research skills. It has long been identified that postgraduate students in South African higher education institutions are poorly prepared in comparison to other countries, which instigated country-level upskilling of master’s and doctoral students; a department of higher education initiative to increase postgraduate throughput and quality (Cloete et al., 2015; Mutula, 2011). The limited understanding, displayed by some, around the relevant epistemological and ontological underpinnings of their research can give rise to the surge in the use of ghostwriters and statisticians at exorbitant costs to students, and long-term legacy impacts associated with persons with the qualifications but not having the skills. Worryingly, under Covid-related restrictions with limited face-to-face contact with supervisors and peers, this could increase.

The gaps between different socio-economic and geographic groupings emerge quite poignantly amidst Covid-19, which reflect that the postgraduate experiences are influenced by social attributes as noted earlier. Limited connectivity could limit the number of online searches for current and relevant literature, jeopardising the quality

of the meta-analyses and systematic reviews, an essential undertaking in the current context. More importantly, postgraduates who have limited access to the internet, relevant hardware and software are further disadvantaged. This is particularly true in the case of shifting to online data collection tools and the use of virtual laboratories for experimental research. Friederici, Ojanperä and Graham (2017) and Manyike (2017) stress the importance of internet connectivity to promote online interactions, stating that internet access enables postgraduate students to interact more regularly with each other and their supervisors.

A positive trend among some universities, that have the technological infrastructure to do so, is the increase in online training for supervisors and students covering various aspects including proposal writing, research design, statistical and qualitative software packages, academic/scientific writing skills, etc. Some students and supervisors (especially those with no or limited internet connectivity and technical know-how) are not well-positioned to benefit from this training. Additionally, there are challenges when undertaking online training which often focus on content and technical aspects rather than critical, context-specific disciplinary skills; which is important at postgraduate levels as noted by Mutala (2011), but tends to be undermined. This type and level of training also require facilitation expertise. Aitken (2019) notes the importance of examining the experiences of academic staff (and students) to online postgraduate education, mostly since this platform will remain even post the pandemic. Aitken (2019) indicates the importance of focusing on variations (which is advocated when adopting social constructivism) in relation to the perceived role of the educator, evolving awareness of the social aspects of online learning, and engagement.

For students undertaking field-based social research, the disruptions are dire since face-to-face contact is restricted. Increasingly, these students are opting to shift their research to desktop studies and/or online or electronic (emails and telephone calls) platforms for primary data collection, which is understandable since it is unclear when the disruptions will cease. These data collection approaches have several limitations in relation to quantitative research including generalisability, even if large response rates are achieved, because of the targeted approach to encourage participation and the fact that only those persons with internet connectivity can participate in the study. In terms of qualitative research, online engagements (for example, focus group discussions and key informant interviews) can undermine the nuances of observing context, body language, and reactions. Thus, quality issues need to be considered when using online platforms and telephonic interviews to undertake research. Supervisors and students need to be aware of these limitations. Specific methodological training is required that encompasses issues pertaining to

research limitations, sampling approaches, data collection challenges (for example, many online surveys are plagued with lower response rates, especially if surveys are longer which doctoral studies tend to be) and how to interpret results.

Manyike's (2017) assessment of postgraduate supervision in an Open Distance E-learning environment in South Africa reveals difficulties associated with training and supervising students in contexts where face-to-face communication between supervisor and student is restricted or totally non-existent. This, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, has become the norm. Yet, as Manyike (2017) indicates, there is a need to train students and supervisors on how to supervise and engage with each other online. Supervisors who are not competent to teach/supervise online revert to a mechanistic approach to supervision which is primarily based on students submitting written drafts and receiving feedback from supervisors in writing, usually using track changes. This negates the add-on value of supervision which places emphasis on critically working through ideas, embracing contestation and debates, and formulating and defending arguments. This happens through engagement, not only between a student and supervisor/s, but between peers and communities of practices (usually via conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.).

Challenges with co-supervision can also be confusing and overwhelming for students under these conditions, especially if the main engagement with students is written feedback on drafts. Olmos-López and Sunderland (2017) assert that co-supervision can be time-consuming and challenging, especially if approaches and viewpoints among supervisors differ. Co-supervision challenges are likely to be exacerbated as a result of the Covid-19 disruptions. If supervisors have not agreed on processes to follow, feedback that differs can be difficult for a student to resolve, especially given student-supervisor power dynamics with students generally hesitant to challenge or disagree with their supervisors. Agreeing on processes could entail, for example, providing one set of comments after resolving differences of opinion. A more academically robust approach would be to discuss the differing points of view with the student to resolve differences so that the student can be trained to disagree academically, which is the cornerstone of academic freedom. It is imperative that the student is a part of and central to making decisions about his/her dissertation/thesis. For doctoral students, this becomes more important since the focus is on the student's contribution to knowledge and demonstrating expertise in a particular field/area of research.

As indicated earlier, a large proportion of South Africa's postgraduate students are foreigners, mainly from Africa. Yet, in dealing with the pandemic (from closing universities to moving online) very little attention has been paid to this cohort of

postgraduate students. In terms of internet connectivity, discussed earlier, the challenges experienced in South Africa are even worse in many parts of Africa with connectivity in many places being non-existent, unreliable and expensive (Friederici et al., 2017; Mohamedbhai, 2020). Friederici et al. (2017) refer to the mirage of inclusive digital development in Africa. Many foreign students are, therefore, unlikely to benefit from existing training efforts using online platforms. Students may also experience difficulties in accessing and downloading internet-based resources.

Undertaking research and supervising when home-based

The shift to remote teaching and learning came almost instantaneously; however, there was limited consideration of the following aspects:

- Increased assumption that both students and supervisors are able to work independently.
- Changes in the number of hours spent on work-related activities given that most would now juggle home and family responsibilities while attempting to meet their daily 8-hour work obligation.
- The need to establish home offices, ensure connectivity, access to suitable hardware and software, all during a Level 5 lockdown. During these restrictions, only essential items could be purchased.
- The ability to multi-task across sectors while working from home and the resultant impacts on the mental and psychological well-being of employees.
- The risks posed to people living in abusive relationships.

These aspects are discussed in this section.

It is important to note that in relation to supervisors, these are academics who generally also have undergraduate teaching responsibilities and are themselves learning new teaching tools and approaches. Furthermore, many academics in South Africa are themselves students completing their doctoral studies, as indicated earlier. These academics have the triple burden of balancing family life, their work, and their student commitments; experiencing many of the challenges outlined in this chapter as students. Furthermore, key issues that need to be better understood are whether experienced supervisors are better able to cope and guide students during periods of severe disruptions. Furthermore, are the workloads of some of the supervisors an issue? Unequitable workload distribution among academics has been noted by Sadiq et al. (2019). In the South African context, more established researchers who are a part of the professoriate tend to have lower undergraduate teaching loads. This has major impacts on the morale of emerging academics, as well as their research productivity, including their ability to successfully supervise postgraduate students to completion since preparing for and teaching online can be extremely time consuming and demanding, especially if the necessary skills, software and hardware

are not in place. Additionally, given that many students are unable to participate in online classes, it is possible that academics are repeating classes and assessments to accommodate students. An interesting, potential student-supervisor dynamic that is likely to be experienced is that some students may be more competent with using online platforms than their supervisors as a result of the generational gap.

Reliance on technology in relation to studying and supervising from home is a major feature of the current response to cope with the pandemic disruptions. However, as discussed earlier, access to technology and internet connectivity can disadvantage certain groups, especially those in rural areas and poorer students (if universities are not providing adequate data bundles and internet connectivity). Additionally, research quality and training issues need to be considered.

Students (and supervisors) are and can experience high levels of anxiety and stress to cope and adapt to these dramatic and unpredictable changes, which can impact on their psychological well-being and impact on their ability to focus on their studies and roles as supervisors, respectively. As Albertyn and Bennett (2020) state, postgraduate students often experience uncertainties when planning and conducting research. They further assert that uncertainties are critical for good research; however, if not appropriately managed could negatively impact on the quality of the research, completion rates and the well-being of students. They note the importance of supervisors to support students to understand and cope with anxieties and advocate for the need for supervisors to be trained to assist students to cope. In the South African context, this situation is worse with many supervisors themselves experiencing these stressors because they are also completing doctoral studies. During this time of heightened uncertainties, dealing with anxiety and stress becomes more pronounced.

In addition to academic apprehensions, anxieties can also be associated with juggling personal and professional lives, other stressors at home (such as being in abusive relationships), anxiety about employment prospects or continued employment (in the case of supervisors), restrictions students face, and fear of the virus (for self and loved ones). In addition to the stress, fear, anxiety and uncertainty that often characterise postgraduate studies; these emotions could be enhanced as a consequence of the lockdown. Sood (2020) asserts the need for interventions to prevent long-term psychological morbidity associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The impacts of Covid-19 are escalating, with some studies citing increases in suicide and suicidal tendencies, depression, stress, fatigue and overall stress (Karnon, 2020; Kazmi, Hasan, Talib & Saxena, 2020).

Studying from home poses additional burdens for women in particular. Female students based at home have the triple burden of studying, taking care of the bulk of the domestic responsibilities (cleaning and cooking) and being caregivers (especially if members of the household include children and elderly persons). Additionally, gender-based violence is experienced worldwide and the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, in his speech to the nation on 17 June 2020 apologises to girls and women as they are subjected to the additional pandemic of gender-based violence in the country:

It is with the heaviest of hearts that I stand before the women and girls of South Africa this evening to talk about another pandemic that is raging in our country – the killing of women and children by the men of our country.

Thus, many female students are at a substantial disadvantage compared to their male counterparts.

Some supervisors and students could be more productive and focused during this period. These are generally persons who may have help at home, have the necessary infrastructure and space to work effectively from home, are undertaking desktop-based research, and/or have data.

Cloete et al. (2015) indicate that doctoral students are allocated to supervisors mainly via administrative processes or students engaging with supervisors before being registered. Students and supervisors who 'choose' each other are more likely to have better relationships compared to supervisors who have been allocated students who they deem to not be undertaking research in their area of research or perceive to be under-prepared. Students allocated in the former manner are also more likely to successfully graduate and have more productive and collegial student-supervisor relationships.

Recommendations to improve postgraduate supervision and training post-pandemic

A key contribution of this chapter is its forward-looking stance to reflect on recommendations emanating from the Covid-19 response experiences and the challenges exposed. As indicated earlier, it is imperative to underscore that most (if not all, given that protests have persistently led to the closure of universities) of the postgraduate training and supervision challenges that universities are grappling with are not the result of the pandemic, but have been reinforced by the current crisis and has exposed the under-preparedness to manage and adequately supervise postgraduate students. Pillay (2019) highlights that inclusion and equity remain elusive in the South Africa context. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced and further exposed glaring inequalities in the higher education sector.

Universities (and society more generally) need to tackle discriminatory practices head-on in relation to how and which students are recruited for postgraduate studies, how students are supported during and after completion of their degrees, and sensitivity to the differing lived realities of students. This includes addressing persistent imbalances and inequities in relation to gender, sexual orientation, population group, disability status and other forms of discriminatory practices. Shifts in teaching, learning, and supervision modalities (such as online learning as discussed earlier) need to consider implications for different groups. As this chapter has highlighted, these changes can reinforce existing inequalities and have consequences that universities should anticipate. Targeted assistance should be provided for students who are further disadvantaged.

A key issue as the research world shifts to online and electronic platforms is what is the plight of students without internet connectivity? What are their research options? Some research options include identifying data sources where collection has been completed. Several disciplines use these data sources, which can include survey results from national or municipal studies, spatial data, data embedded in publicly available reports, etc. Supervisors unfamiliar with these sources need to engage with colleagues who know how to access and use the data in the context of peer learning and mentoring so that they are better positioned to support students who cannot do any form of primary data collection. Since much of this data is publicly available for free, library services at universities need to focus on creating data portals with these types of information for researchers and students. Again, however, as discussed earlier, it is important to reiterate the need for training on how to source and use this data, which also has limitations.

There is a need to develop and embrace innovative approaches to foster research and collaboration for improved data collection rather than have students attempt to collect data under current conditions that could undermine standards of validity and reliability. Additionally, students and supervisors (if applicable) need to be trained on the limitations of undertaking online research or switching to research designs that they are not trained to fully understand.

The student-supervisor relationship is the cornerstone of successful postgraduate education. Capacitating supervisors with the necessary skills to have the expertise to uphold rigorous academic standards and research integrity will ensure that future generations of researchers and supervisors will break the legacy of inadequate supervision and poorly trained graduates (if they complete their studies). Additionally, training needs to focus on softer skills as well to create a culture of mentoring and coaching that assists in developing graduates that are knowledgeable

in their field, are research competent, and understand issues of empathy, embracing flexibility and change, adaptability, being self-motivated and disciplined, conducting themselves ethically, taking responsibility, and having the necessary social skills to interact with others.

Collaboration, as well as sharing of expertise and resources, will strengthen universities in South Africa. Specifically, public universities in South Africa need to be seen as part of one system and mechanisms need to be put in place where students can access laboratories, library facilities, and attend practicals and training sessions at universities close to where they reside, although they may be registered at other universities. This will require comprehensive databases of current students and supervisors, as well as appropriate administrative processes that support these efforts. It is also important to note that more students and supervisors are becoming aware of the multitude of resources available (including videos, presentations, guidelines, etc.) to assist them to develop the skills needed for successful postgraduate studies. There are also freely available packages and programmes to develop online surveys, assist with academic writing and editing, and undertake additional training. Universities need to share this information with both students and supervisors.

Conclusion

The discussion reveals that universities across South Africa have responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to embracing online learning. However, the range of socio-economic conditions that different groups of students face in different locations (during the lockdown being home-based and as restrictions ease, most will continue their studies from home); supervisor experience, capacity and workloads; disciplinary and methodological differences; and persistent unresolved inequalities and challenges within South Africa's higher education sector and specific universities; pose several challenges for many postgraduate students and supervisors. Despite the current conditions faced, key recommendations are emerging to transition universities to change modalities of supervision and rethinking institutional boundaries. The key question is whether universities, supervisors and students will seize the opportunity to utilise these recommendations to radically rethink what constitutes postgraduate studies and how we change processes and systems to address the systemic structural, administrative, supervisory, and quality issues that burden South Africa's higher education system?

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