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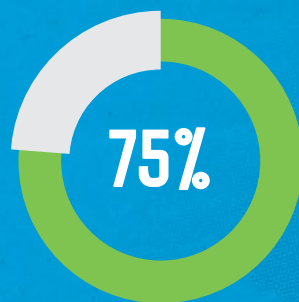
EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID LOCKDOWN STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

The Covid-19 global pandemic has seen disruption to almost every single facet of life around the globe, without exception even in South Africa. Higher education has not been spared, and as President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national lockdown, the sector had to scramble to work under these circumstances. A number of institutions have looked to online learning as a way to save the academic year with no hope for an end to the lockdown in sight, and all on-campus activity having ground to a halt.

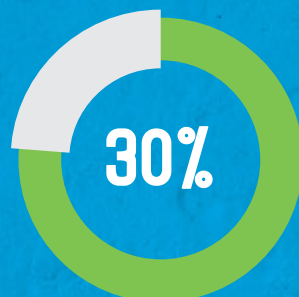
A recent survey with

327

respondents reveals a more realistic picture of what students are dealing with when it comes to their education.

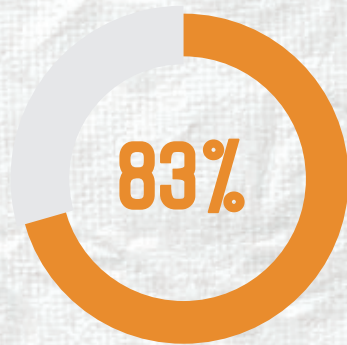


A total of 75% of the respondents, students from various private and public higher education institutions both rural and urban, mostly between the ages of 18 - 25 responded that their studies had been interrupted or completely stopped.



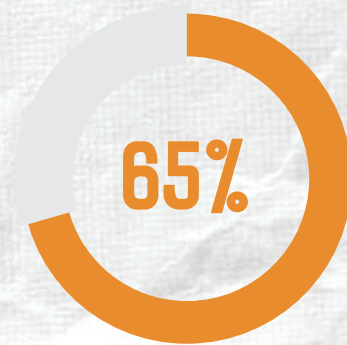
Of them, 41% had no idea if plans had been made for online learning or stated that there were no plans in place by their institutions.

The picture of connectivity and accessibility painted by the respondents is bleak, even as institutions have claimed access to be a minimal challenge and primarily linked to data affordability. Student respondents tell a more detailed story of what their internet accessibility 'looks' like.



INTERNET ACCESS OFF CAMPUS

Over 80% of the students surveyed said they access the internet off-campus via mobile, spending between R100 - R400 on data.



CAN ACCESS ONLINE LEARNING

Most responded positively that yes, they can access online learning, although this leaves a question as to the quality and level of that access.

Since the start of the lockdown, a number of statistics about online learning have been thrown around. A number of institutions have resumed the academic year online, although there seems to be no uniformity in approach, because of the different levels of access to resources. Some institutions remain firmly closed, waiting for the lift in lockdown, which does not seem to be on the horizon in the near future. Throughout these activities, the students have had little visibility in their say, barring from a recent Twitter trend of #BoycottOnlineLearningUJ. A number of student representative bodies have tried to argue for the students, and yet, without statistical data of a realistic picture, have very little to stand on.

When asked to comment on what institutions need to do for them, the most frequent response was assistance with data bundles and laptops. Some institutions have arranged to loan devices to be delivered to students and negotiated with mobile service providers to pay for data (30GB; 10GB anytime and 20GB nightsurfer data), although it is unclear how long the assistance will be in place as well as the financial implications thereof. This indicates that the quality of the access to online learning is limited to a mobile screen, for those with smartphones, which disadvantages students from adequately engaging with content where their institutions are going on with online learning. Many are uncertain of the plans in place for their learning, and those that are carrying on with online learning highlight the difficulty of understanding concepts without engagement. Virtual classes are not a viable solution given the connectivity constraints, lack of resources and no adequate space to study for students. These circumstances make some of them unmotivated to actively engage in study during lockdown and many students fear falling behind. Anxiety is a shared experience among those surveyed: anxious not to lose the academic year, anxious to not become idle at home and anxious not to fall behind or end up repeating an academic year. Only time will adequately tell who really has been left behind, beyond the statistics and anecdotal evidence institutions choose to use to blind themselves to their perpetuation of inequality for those that see education as the tool to escape poverty.

STUDENTS NEED ASSISTANCE FROM THEIR INSTITUTION WITH



LAPTOPS




DATA BUNDLES



WIFI SIGNAL

This is a summarized version of the findings of the study and its outcomes. For a more concise and detailed report on the outcomes and insights, it unearths please get in contact with us on:

 info@asazi.co.za

 [asazibo](#)

 www.asazi.co.za