

TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA

JOURNAL

Teacher Education Through Flexible Learning: Lessons Learned from a Leading African Open Distance e-Learning Institution

Vol 8, 2026

ISSN 2788-6298

Published By

The Unit for Distance Education, Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria, Groenkloof Campus

Cnr of George Storrar and Leyds Street, Pretoria, South Africa

Web address: https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/tetfle

Email address: tetflemanager@up.ac.za

ISSN 2788-6298 (Online)

About the Journal

The Teacher Education through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE) and other developing contexts online journal is a refereed, open-access e-journal that publishes original research on distance teacher education in Africa. TETFLE aims to create a platform for researchers and practitioners on glocal matters that relate to distance teacher education on the continent. Publications cover issues of content, pedagogical consideration, technology and management in distance education. Exemplar papers with rigour showing research evidence are most appreciated.

TETFLE also publishes review articles and book reviews. The journal currently appears once in a year, with an additional special edition from accepted biennial conference papers, as applicable. The journal is the official journal of the Distance Education and Teachers' Training in Africa (DETA) biennial conference, hosted by the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Indexing

TETFLE is indexed by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and listed on the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) List of Approved Journals.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Editorial Team

Editor-in-chief

Folake Ruth Aluko (University of Pretoria)

Associate editors

Mary Ooko (University of Pretoria)

Marie Hyleen Mariaye (University of Mauritius)

Etinosa Olayinka (University of Pretoria)

Editors of the special issue

Prof. C. C. Wolhuter

Comparative and International Education

North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Email: Charl.Wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

Prof. N. K. Dash

Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

Email: nkdash@ignou.ac.in

ISSN 2788-6298

TETFLE TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA JOURNAL

Official publication of the Unit for Distance Education
Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria
Web address: https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/tetfle
Email address: tetflemanager@up.ac.za

Teacher Education Through Flexible Learning: Lessons Learned from a Leading African Open Distance e-Learning Institution

Carlo Emile Daniels
University of South Africa, Department of Educational Foundations
Email: Daniece@unisa.ac.za, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4003-6185

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35293/tetfle.v8i1.6174

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Abstract

The University of South Africa (UNISA) is the largest higher education institution (HEI) in Africa. In fact, UNISA is one of the largest and leading open-distance e-learning (ODeL) institutions in the world and is reputable for its commitment to providing increased access to quality education and flexible teaching. Therefore, UNISA presents a unique context for exploring teacher education through flexible learning. To this end, the current research was conducted between February and May of 2025 and explored the role of flexible learning in teacher education at an influential model in the Global South. The rationale for this research was grounded in the need to address educational challenges in Africa through innovative teaching methods. Employing systematic document analysis and governed by the principles of grounded theory in the collection and analysis of data, this study aimed to explore UNISA's provision of flexible teacher education. The findings revealed that flexible teacher education in Africa is a necessity and a complex undertaking. It is shaped by demographic pressures, economic constraints, historical inequalities, and crisis events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Flexible learning expands access, reduces costs, and offers opportunities for curriculum transformation. Its effectiveness, however, is constrained by systemic challenges, including digital inequalities, resistance to pedagogical change, and limitations in institutional capacity. A key contribution of this research is the development of an emerging theory that reveals that flexible education is a balancing act between expanding access and maintaining quality.

Keywords: digital infrastructure; educational innovation; flexible learning; Global South; local and international partnership; open distance e-learning; scalable solutions; teacher education; technological advancements; University of South Africa

Introduction

According to Amoah and Le Roux (2025), education has historically relied on in-person, face-to-face interactions. However, since the emergence of flexible learning tools such as information communication technology (ICT), there has been a notable increase in online flexible learning in higher education institutions (HEIs). Amoah and Le Roux (2025) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in promoting remote education, serving as an unexpected catalyst for flexible teaching and learning. In a short period of time, educational advancement occurred at an unprecedented rate, surpassing many accomplishments of the past two decades. As a result of the innovations adopted during the pandemic, Mhlongo et al. (2023) reported that scholarly literature does not rule out the potential transformation of the traditional brick-and-mortar education system to flexible learning institutions. Mhlongo et al. (2023) were convinced that future educational frameworks are likely to be grounded in personalised, self-paced learning that will require diminished intervention from teachers.

Despite the advantages, Trines (2018) observed that online education remains a contentious subject in the scholarly discourse. On the one hand, some stakeholders regard flexible education as a lesser educational alternative, as it offers a solitary learning environment at best. On the other hand, advocates of flexible education view it as an essential opportunity to enhance educational accessibility. Kaisara and Bwalya (2021) noted that many developing nations in Africa have recognised the significance and potential of flexible learning. As a result, several countries on the continent have strategically chosen to implement flexible learning as an essential approach to making HEIs more accessible and affordable. As pointed out by Saidi et al. (2021), the rise of flexible technological tools such as mobile devices and the development of telecommunication services have resulted in flexible digital learning environments. Lecturers are empowered to deploy ICT to upload presentation slides, create video conference classes, and engage in discussion forums, online assessments, e-mail communication, and remote laboratories. For Milićević et al. (2021), the advantage of flexible learning is grounded in the fact that it is efficient, practical, and flexible. More specifically, learning can occur anywhere in the world at any time. In fact, students can learn as much content as they desire, when they wish to, and in a location of their choice.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Scholars such as Bobyliev and Vihrova (2021) noted that distance learning, as a form of flexible learning, originated in the 18th century and has evolved in its practices and resources. A review of the literature (Bobyliev & Vihrova, 2021; Jones & Walters, 2015; Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021; Milićević et al., 2021) shows no consensus on when ICT was first introduced into education, though some trace its role in flexible learning to the 1960s (Milićević et al., 2021). The foundations of modern e-learning emerged around 1980, with the term gaining prominence in 1999 (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). In the 21st century, ICT has transformed HEIs, by enabling more flexible learning arrangements aligned with learners' responsibilities (Jacobs & Ferreira-Meyers, 2024; Jones & Walters, 2015). Mouton and Subban (2023) identified open, flexible, and distance learning as foundational to open-distance e-learning (ODeL), distinguishing it from distance education by its student-centred approach that removes access barriers while maintaining structure. Flexible learning enables students to control the pace, place, and mode of learning (Andrade, 2023; Hammersley et al., 2013). It includes modalities such as e-learning, mobile learning, and online learning (Joan, 2013), and allows learners to customise their study sequence and content engagement (Lockee & Clark-Stallkamp, 2022).

Milićević et al. (2021) projected that flexible teaching tools such as Moodle are utilised by more than 30 000 educational establishments globally. Employing the capabilities of Moodle, lecturers upload teaching materials such as texts, recorded lessons, presentations, and narrated slides. Meanwhile, virtual consultations with lecturers may be performed within the discussion forums online and via e-mail communication (Jacobs & Ferreira-Meyers, 2024). In addition to Moodle, affordable, everyday tools for communication, such as WhatsApp on mobile phones and other devices, offer students and HEIs accessible and user-friendly technology for learning. Jackson (2020) and De Jager (2024) reported that this flexibility is particularly beneficial in less affluent countries located on the African continent. For instance, Trines (2018) revealed that in Sierra Leone, WhatsApp has emerged as a popular tool for flexible teaching and learning that has the capacity to allow educators to provide audio and video teaching resources. According to Trines (2018), digital learning promises a cheaper and more instantaneous remedy compared to building even more brick-and-mortar institutions. Given that many economically challenged African countries face infrastructural limitations that hinder the enrolment of prospective higher education students, the promising benefits of flexible learning may elucidate the widespread enthusiasm for its adoption throughout the continent (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). Therefore, it is no surprise that governments in developing nations such as Africa are increasingly considering flexible teaching and learning as an educational solution to

bridge accessibility and capacity gaps. Whether or not online education can live up to this promise in Africa and beyond remains to be seen. Regardless, the growth potential for online education in Africa is immense, as some scholars, such as Trines (2018), consider Africa the most dynamic e-learning market on the planet.

Zooming in on marginalised geographic locations, Johanson and Karlsen (2021) noted that HEIs have transitioned from traditional classrooms to online, flexible learning platforms to solve educational gaps in many rural areas. The increase in distance teacher education programmes is a response to the need for qualified teachers in these regions. According to the same authors, lessons learned from international studies on flexible education experiences have demonstrated that ICT can improve access to education and the quality thereof. In turn, this leads to the development of more qualified teachers. In this regard, Kaisara and Bwalya (2021) noted that African nations have increasingly integrated flexible learning to broaden access to education. The rising enrolment in HEIs across the continent and the diminishing pool of qualified teachers have intensified the demand for flexible learning solutions.

Meanwhile, in the African context under study, Bobyliev and Vihrova (2021) noted that South African HEIs adopted e-learning towards flexible learning in 1990. As a result of student protests in 2015, flexible learning gained academic and practical momentum, especially at contact universities, where students were traditionally expected to attend class in physical lecture halls located on campus (Jacobs & Ferreira-Meyers, 2024). Access to quality higher education in the country is also among the several targets of the country's National Development Plan (NDP), Vision 2030 (South African Government, 2011), and the South African White Paper on education and training of 1995 dedicated itself to distance education (Mouton & Subban, 2023). Thus, it is no surprise that expanding access, improving quality, and increasing diversity are the main objectives of South Africa's higher education policy (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). In the voice of Zongozzi (2022), to serve the country more broadly, the policy recognises a need for more places for people to learn, more types of courses and qualifications, more financial support for students, and better-quality education and training. Zongozzi (2022) posits that ODeL institutions are particularly well-suited to fulfil the aims outlined in the educational policy, because of their ability to serve a diverse student body and offer more affordable tuition with less stringent admission criteria.

The concern is that, for the most part, African HEIs have traditionally been unresponsive to the needs of working students. Instead, they focus primarily on mainstream learning, which caters to young, full-time, residential students, while offering only limited part-time options for working adults (Jones & Walters, 2015). Against this backdrop, the current

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

study explored teacher education through flexible learning at Africa's largest ODeL institution, the University of South Africa (UNISA). UNISA is commonly classified as one of the world's mega universities. The institution is acknowledged as a leading comprehensive ODeL university. Although enrolment rates vary, the latest figures suggest that UNISA houses approximately 400 000 students worldwide (UNISA, 2024a). The need for teacher education through flexible learning is not unique to South Africa, but extends to the rest of Africa as well. Considering the number of students enrolled as a criterion, UNISA is the largest university in South Africa and on the African continent (Okafor, 2024). In 2017, 22 per cent of all educators entering a public school in SA studied through flexible learning approaches at UNISA. In 2022, focusing on teacher training, UNISA's Faculty of Education enrolled 93 000 students and graduated 12 844 educators (UNISA, 2022). Therefore, UNISA has the necessary resources, student size, and expertise to impactfully contribute to the discourse and actions on flexible learning. As UNISA has been registering students from all over Africa (since 1906), the university serves as an ideal setting to examine the broader educational trends, discourse, and tensions regarding teacher education through flexible learning (UNISA, 2024b). Challenges such as connectivity and staff capacity are well documented in the scholarly literature. This research contributes new insight by exploring how these issues interact and are managed in a mega ODeL institution in the Global South.

Research methodology

The current study employed a qualitative methodology grounded in a postmodern research paradigm. More specifically, a qualitative research methodology enabled the exploration of the intricacies of teacher education within the context of flexible teaching and learning practices.

Research paradigm

The current study was framed within an exploratory qualitative approach informed by a postmodern research perspective (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Nieuwenhuis (2020) highlighted that exploratory qualitative studies primarily aim to deepen understanding of a particular topic, group, process, or context. In this instance, the topic pertains to flexible learning, the group comprises pre-service teachers, and the context is UNISA. The intent of a postmodern paradigm is not to ascertain definitive truths or facts, but to investigate and articulate the characteristics of a specific context and its relevance to a specific group of individuals in a particular context (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). In the current study, the aim

was to evaluate the effectiveness of UNISA (the specific context) in preparing pre-service teachers (the specific group) through the implementation of flexible learning.

Theoretical framework

Grounded theory constitutes an interpretive research methodology, intricately linked to symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), with methodological foundations traced back to the Chicago School of Sociology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990), grounded theory involves the systematic development of a theory derived from rigorously chosen and analysed data. In qualitative research, it is imperative that scholars refrain from commencing their studies with a predetermined theoretical framework aimed at testing and confirming existing findings (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Rather, in alignment with the inductive reasoning model, a theory may emerge organically throughout the processes of data collection and analysis. This approach effectively mitigates the potential for researcher bias, thereby enhancing the integrity of data collection and analysis. Accordingly, in the current study, the researcher meticulously adhered to the principles of grounded theory in the systematic collection and analysis of data, culminating in the identification of an emergent theory.

The principal aim of grounded theory analysis is to derive concepts, conceptual categories, and the interrelationships among them directly from the data. This approach facilitates the development of a theory firmly anchored in the lived experiences of research participants, eschewing reliance on pre-existing theoretical frameworks to interpret those experiences. Unlike other interpretive methodologies, grounded theory prioritises understanding variability and elaborating complexity within social phenomena. Furthermore, it elucidates how social processes generate meaning and how contextual conditions shape these processes. These attributes render grounded theory, particularly well-suited for exploring intricate concepts such as teacher education within the framework of flexible learning. Grounded theory was operationalised through an iterative process of data collection and analysis. Simply put, data collection and analysis (coding) occurred concurrently.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Data collection

The emergence of document analysis as a research method within the social sciences can be traced back to the pioneering work of Goode and Hatt (1952), who advocated systematic screening, counting, and coding of document content to provide research findings. In subsequent research, Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that documents should be regarded within social investigations as similar to the role of informants in anthropology or interviewees in sociology. This qualitative study employed the method of document analysis, a rigorous and systematic approach that entails a thorough examination of documents to attain an in-depth understanding of the research subject (Bowen, 2009). The versatility of document analysis is noteworthy, as it can serve as a supplementary method alongside other data collection techniques and as a standalone methodological approach. Merriam and Grenier (2019), alongside Bowen (2009), reported that although most grounded theory studies rely heavily on interviews and observational methods, research that concentrates solely on document analysis can likewise leverage grounded theory as a guiding framework. Given the intrinsic value of document analysis as a research method, one might anticipate a broad spectrum of studies employing it for data collection purposes. Regrettably, the existing literature findings on documentary research remain limited (Morgan, 2022). Each document was treated as a unit of analysis and systematically examined for recurring open codes and meanings related to flexible teacher education. The documents were not analysed in isolation. Instead, they were compared to identify similarities, differences, and emerging themes.

Sampling

In accordance with the recommendations made by Creswell (2009), the current study employed a purposeful sampling strategy to address the potential inconsistencies and inconclusiveness that may arise from random document selection. Purposeful sampling was particularly effective as it allowed for the selection of cases (documents) that are rich in information and directly aligned with the objectives of the study (Suri, 2011). By focusing on information-rich documents, the researcher could achieve an in-depth understanding of teacher education through flexible learning. In this investigation, a total of 38 pertinent documents (as listed in the references) were purposefully sampled from the official UNISA website and from online databases such as Google Scholar. Documents were selected on the condition that they contained details about flexible education, UNISA, teacher education at an ODeL institution, and challenges associated with flexible education. The 38 selected

documents were an adequate sample size to achieve theoretical and data saturation and the study's purpose. The documents used in the research are referenced in the findings section.

Data analysis

This study employed content analysis as a qualitative method to systematically investigate a set of 38 purposefully selected documents. The analysis followed three stages. Open coding to identify initial concepts, axial coding to establish relationships between categories, and selective coding to integrate these categories into themes. Throughout this process, analytical memos were written to document emerging findings. The open coding of transcripts utilised a framework informed by Schatzman's dimensional analysis (Schatzman, 1991). Throughout this process, specific codes began to emerge by establishing connections among concepts and conditions, supported by extensive memo writing aimed at documenting and refining an evolving theoretical perspective (Strauss, 1987). As the analytical process unfolded, it guided the acquisition of new documents and shaped decisions regarding theoretical and data saturation. The analytical endeavour reached a conclusion when no new insights, open codes, axial codes, or selective codes were identified. In essence, data collection and analysis concluded at the point of achieving theoretical and data saturation. A visual representation of the formation of open codes, axial codes, and selective codes is depicted in Table 1 below:

Table I: Excerpt of visual representation of the coding process

Document Extract	Open Code (n=175)	Axial Code (n=34)	Selective Code (n=9)	Theme
"Africa's population is expected to double by 2050… youth population growth will affect the education sector."	Population growth pressure	Demographic expansion and demand	Structural drivers of flexible learning	Need for teacher education through flexible learning in Africa

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Document Extract	Open Code (n=175)	Axial Code (n=34)	Selective Code (n=9)	Theme
"Teacher education has gained the impression of being resistant to transformation."	Resistance to change	Institutional inertia	Barriers to pedagogical transformation	Challenges associated with flexible teacher education

Source: Author's own

Ethical considerations

The method of document analysis serves to mitigate many of the ethical concerns commonly associated with alternative qualitative approaches, such as interviews (Morgan, 2022). Tripathy (2013) asserted that the ethical implications associated with document analysis are generally minimal. When documents are readily accessible on the Internet, in published literature, or through other public platforms, their use for analysis is warranted, provided that appropriate credit is duly attributed to the original sources and their authors.

Limitations

Document analysis is not without its limitations. Bowen (2009) and Medlock (2015) cautioned that some documents may lack sufficient detail, as they were not originally intended for research purposes. There may also be constraints on access to certain documents, alongside the possibility that some information may be outdated or irrelevant. Furthermore, the selection and interpretation of documents carry a risk of bias. Despite these challenges, such limitations were mitigated through thorough methodological rigor and transparency. Considering time management, available resources, and accessibility to HEIs and academics, the current study included only one HEI. For this reason, the study was informative; however, the findings cannot be generalised to other institutions.

Findings

The purpose of the current study was to explore teacher education through flexible learning at a leading ODeL institution. To achieve this, data collection and analysis followed a rigorous process informed by the principles of grounded theory. Through this meticulous coding procedure, 175 open codes were identified, which were subsequently organised into 34 axial codes by exploring the interrelationships among the concepts. These axial codes

acted as categories, culminating in the identification of nine selective codes (see Table 1). These selective codes were synthesised into themes that were used as the nine headings in the findings section hereafter.

The need for teacher education through flexible learning in Africa

The analysed documents revealed that flexible teacher education in Africa is not limited to being a technological advancement. Instead, it is an adaptive response to socio-economic and educational pressures. Educational practitioners in Africa are advocating the use of open and distance education to expand and improve the quality of education toward development (Mouton & Subban, 2023). According to Jevsikova et al. (2021), a central aspect of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 is for teachers to employ flexible teaching and learning strategies to deliver quality education. The analysis revealed that advantages of flexible learning include reductions in educational costs, the provision of flexible and accessible learning opportunities, a lower environmental footprint, and enhanced access to high-quality educational resources (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021; Tlili et al., 2022). According to Wolhuter and Jacobs (2021), the evolution of teacher education in Africa should not be viewed solely as a response to technological advancements, policy reforms, and changing student needs. Instead, this transition should be seen as an opportunity to use new tools to advance the old. The document analysis revealed that the need for teacher education through flexible learning in Africa is grounded in:

- Demographic trends in the continent
- Cost-effective method to reduce educational costs
- Decolonising the curriculum
- Educational disparities
- The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic

Regarding demographic trends in Africa, Trines (2018) projected that Africa's population would double by 2050. The author forecasted that urban centres such as Lagos and Kinshasa would likely surpass 20 million residents by 2030. In fact, Nigeria's population is expected to reach approximately 400 million by 2050, making it the third most populous country in the world. Meanwhile, Niger is expected to experience a 92 per cent increase in its youth population from 2015 to 2030, which will undoubtedly affect the education sector. According to Ayentimi and Burgess (2019), the growth in Africa's youth population necessitates flexible learning approaches in teacher education to effectively accommodate diverse learning needs. Therefore, teacher education through flexible learning is essential

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

because of its ability to address the urgent need for adaptable teaching methods in response to Africa's anticipated population growth.

As a cost-effective way to reduce educational costs, flexible learning is a necessity in Africa, as online education can broaden educational access (Trines, 2018). According to Trines (2018), the escalating population growth and increasing demand for educational services are compelling African countries to more extensively capitalise on online educational platforms. As the continent grapples with a burgeoning population and a shortage of qualified educators, flexible, remote learning opportunities can offer avenues for professional development.

Regarding decolonisation, teacher education through flexible learning offers a notable opportunity to decolonise the curriculum by providing flexible materials that reflect diverse cultural contexts and knowledge systems (Tlili et al., 2022). Decolonising the curriculum in previously colonised countries, such as those located in Africa is essential, since educational frameworks, practices, and content remain influenced by historical colonial powers.

In addressing educational inequalities, shifting from traditional classroom settings to flexible education in Africa is crucial to reduce disparities in rural regions (Johanson & Karlsen, 2021). Many nations, including those in Africa, are grappling with the challenge of producing enough qualified teachers (Podolsky et al., 2019). As a result, teacher education programmes in Africa have turned to flexible learning to train prospective and in-service educators.

The scholarly literature (Aristeidou & Cross, 2021; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Jevsikova et al., 2021; Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021; Milićević et al., 2021; Quezada et al., 2020; Saidi et al., 2021; Scherer et al., 2020) supporting the need for teacher education through flexible learning points to the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created an emergency that required an immediate shift to distance education, which many African countries were not prepared for. With the closure of educational institutions, novice and experienced educators were compelled to adapt rapidly to remote teaching environments (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). In fact, the pandemic has catalysed a global shift toward flexible learning in HEIs, necessitating that teacher educators modify their instructional strategies swiftly, regardless of their prior readiness (Aristeidou & Cross, 2021; Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021; Milićević et al., 2021; Quezada et al., 2020; Scherer et al., 2020). According to Jevsikova et al. (2021), the pandemic is unlikely to represent a singular historical event. Similar crises could occur in the future. Therefore, it is crucial

that HEIs in Africa and beyond prepare to deliver high-quality education (at all levels) in response to education in emergency situations. In this regard, flexible teacher education programmes equip in-service teachers as well as teachers in training education to deliver quality education in virtual and face-to-face settings (Ellis et al., 2020; Saidi et al., 2021).

Challenges associated with flexible teacher education and learning in Africa

The document analysis reported that flexible educational environments in Africa are faced with numerous challenges hindering effective teaching and learning (Faturoti, 2022). For instance, Amoah and Le Roux (2025) explored students' challenges with online remote teaching and learning in South Africa. Their findings revealed a range of challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure to support flexible learning, information gaps in utilising flexible learning tools, and unsuitable home learning environments. Flexible teacher education in Africa presents a range of challenges that should be addressed to ensure its effectiveness. The challenges are many. However, the document analysis identified three main challenges in the context of Africa.

The analysed documents (Ellis et al., 2020; Glover & Hutchinson, 2023) pointed out that the first challenge is grounded in the fact that the field of teacher education has created the impression of being resistant to transformation. As a result, in some cases, teacher training programmes and professional development do not prepare teachers adequately to meet the diverse needs of learners (Faturoti, 2022). In fact, resistance to transformation in teacher education in Africa is leading to limited familiarity among teachers with remote instruction, which hinders the attainment of quality of education for all (Amoah & Le Roux, 2025). Pietersen (2023) called for urgent attention to be devoted to pedagogical adaptation to facilitate a socially equitable online learning environment. In turn, teachers will be well-equipped to embrace flexible teaching pedagogies that cater to and promote the diverse needs of students.

The second challenge found in the analysis of data is grounded in the fact that not all students have adequate access to flexible learning materials due to poor connectivity and inadequate resources (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Phejane, 2022). Trines (2018) pointed out that in Africa, many students lack personal computers and face obstacles related to affordable and consistent Internet connectivity. As a result, technical challenges, such as low audio and video quality, impede quality flexible teaching and learning (Amoah & Le Roux, 2025). South Africa's pre-existing digital divides are further accentuated by its income and wealth inequalities, which negatively affect the digital proficiency of marginalised students

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

(Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). The limited access to flexible learning materials among students in Africa exacerbates the digital divide, reduces the quality of education, and restricts participation for students from underprivileged backgrounds (Trines, 2018). Aruleba and Jere (2022) noted that the challenge is especially true in African rural areas, where the digital divide hinders students' ability to acquire essential information technology skills for flexible learning. The cost of mobile devices and other technology-enabled tools can also be excessively high for individuals located in these areas.

Many African HEIs have inadequate planning (Faturoti, 2022) and struggle to formulate coherent e-learning policies, which accounts for the last identified challenge (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). Consequently, fragmented and inadequately planned initiatives towards flexible teaching and learning follow. As a result of an inadequate strategic vision in policy, a prominent Ghanaian university that initially led in the adoption of e-learning on the African continent has made minimal progress (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). The resistance to adopting flexible pedagogies hinders educators from meeting diverse learner needs. An obvious starting point for addressing these challenges is the need for comprehensive policy frameworks that promote the integration of flexible learning and strategic investments in infrastructure to improve connectivity and resource availability. However, it is important to note that investment and policy will be in vain if teacher training programmes do not evolve to leverage flexible teaching and learning strategies.

The analysis revealed that challenges such as the digital divide and resistance to pedagogical change are grounded in systemic conditions. The digital divide is caused by socio-economic inequalities and limited institutional resources. Similarly, resistance to pedagogical transformation is embedded in institutional cultures and insufficient professional development for educators. Addressing these challenges requires increased investment in digital infrastructure, inclusive e-learning policies, and the integration of flexible pedagogies into teacher education and professional development.

Context of the leading ODeL institution under study

Using student enrolment headcount as a criterion, UNISA is currently the largest university on the African continent and uniquely serves as a HEI exclusively dedicated to distance and flexible education (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2012). Ngubane-Mokiwa (2017) pointed out that in (South) Africa, ODeL institutions such as UNISA play a crucial role in advancing teacher education. Historically, many educators in South Africa were denied access to higher education opportunities due to the discriminatory policies instituted during the

apartheid era of 1948 to 1994. The apartheid era in South Africa, lasting from 1948 to 1994, was marked by institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination. During this era, the rights and opportunities of non-white individuals, including access to education were restricted. UNISA is positioned to play a pivotal role in enhancing access to higher education for marginalised populations (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2012). Through their delivery of flexible teacher training programmes, UNISA has been responsible for training a greater number of educators than all the other 25 public universities in South Africa combined (Van Wyk et al., 2021). The College of Education (CEDU) at UNISA is the largest of the eight colleges in the university and has in recent years produced more than 52 per cent of teacher graduates in the South African educational landscape (Van Wyk et al., 2021).

UNISA serves as a viable avenue to teacher training for many working adult citizens who have previously been marginalised from such opportunities due to factors beyond their control (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2012). According to Faturoti (2022) and Kaisara and Bwalya (2021), many African HEIs struggle to formulate coherent e-learning policies. Mouton and Subban (2023), however, noted that this was not a challenge at UNISA. The policy documents of UNISA indicate the concept of an ODeL institution that employs flexible learning as a tool to bridge time, economic, social, educational, and communication distance between the student and the institution. These policies include the ODeL policy of 2008, the Institutional Operational Plan, the Learner Support Policy, and the 2015 Strategic Plan.

CEDU

The history

According to Gezani (2024), the popularity of flexible learning in South Africa is attributable to its inherent flexibility, which permits students to learn from any location at any time. UNISA has transitioned from traditional correspondence education to distance education and more recently, to an open distance learning model. The same author further noted that since 2011, UNISA has embraced ODeL, providing access to course modules via the myUnisa learning management system. The university encourages interactions among students and between students and lecturers. Each course includes a comprehensive learning guide that encompasses course materials, activities with constructive feedback, reflections, and supplementary readings. Additionally, course pages are equipped with discussion forums that allow students to engage with one another.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Gezani (2024) reported that the South African government has tasked UNISA with the mandate of enrolling a diverse student body and providing higher educational opportunities. Considering contemporary educational challenges in South Africa, the university is strategically positioned to advance its vision and objectives regarding e-learning and to compete within the global educational landscape. Most students at UNISA are adult learners who are concurrently employed, making the balancing of work and academic responsibilities critical. Online learning modalities offer these students the flexibility necessary to navigate their professional obligations alongside their educational pursuits.

Focusing on the historical background, CEDU was formally established in 2004 as part of a comprehensive restructuring initiative to consolidate various faculties and departments. This effort sought to enhance operational efficiency and establish a focused approach towards key areas in the field of education (UNISA, 2023a). Initially, CEDU addressed the pressing need for qualified educators in South Africa by offering teacher training programmes. This included diplomas and certificates in education, which primarily catered to in-service teachers seeking to upgrade their qualifications (UNISA, 2025b). Between 2004 and 2010, CEDU expanded its offerings to include undergraduate and postgraduate degrees across various educational fields. This expansion was grounded in meeting the demands for educators capable of contributing at all levels of the education system (UNISA, 2025b) and included the establishment of research units and centres (UNISA, 2023a).

The years 2010 to 2020 were dedicated to integrating technology into CEDU's educational principles and practices. CEDU embraced online learning and distance education, which broadened the international reach of the institution by offering flexible educational options for working professionals (UNISA, 2023a). During this period, the college continuously updated its curriculum in response to emerging educational trends and advancements. This included, but was not limited to, incorporating innovative teaching methodologies and educational technologies, and a strong focus on contemporary issues such as inclusive education and educational leadership (UNISA, 2023a).

From 2020 to the present, CEDU has actively engaged in community service initiatives, collaborating with schools and educational organisations to enhance educational quality in underserved areas (UNISA, 2023a). Today, it is recognised for its comprehensive ODeL academic programmes, extensive research contributions, and commitment to improving education in SA and beyond. CEDU continues to evolve, adapting its offerings to meet the

dynamic needs of the education sector through flexible approaches to enhance educational delivery (UNISA, 2023a).

The mission and vision

In terms of the objectives of UNISA, CEDU's vision is to be the preeminent provider of high-quality ODeL educational programmes in Africa. UNISA aims to establish itself as an internationally recognised centre of excellence in the domains of teaching, research, and community engagement. The college primarily focuses on the initial preparation of teachers and the ongoing professional development of educators in areas such as Mathematics, Science, Technology, Environmental Education, Early Childhood Development Education, Inclusive Education, Adult Basic Education and Training, Language Education, as well as other subjects deemed as national priorities. Meanwhile, CEDU's mission is to foster educational opportunities for all individuals by delivering scholarship, service, learning, and continuous professional development to teachers in the making and practicing educators, managers, and policymakers (UNISA, 2023b).

Schools, departments, centres, and institutes

The academic structure comprises two schools with various departments, as well as centres and institutes that provide specialised training (UNISA, 2025a), as specified hereafter:

The School of Educational Studies, which includes the following departments:

- Adult Community and Continuing Education
- Educational Foundations
- Psychology of Education
- Inclusive Education
- Educational Leadership and Management

The School of Teacher Education, which includes the following departments:

- Mathematics Education
- Science and Technology Education
- Language Education, Arts, and Culture
- Curriculum and Instructional Studies
- Early Childhood Education

The centres are:

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

- Centre for Continuing Education and Training
- Teaching Practice Office
- Centre of Excellence on Disabilities

Academic principles and practices are further supported by institutes such as the Institute for Open and Distance Learning, which focuses on innovative educational approaches in a diverse from the department of learning environment.

Programmes offered

UNISA (2023b) reported that formal qualifications are defined as those that receive financial support for Higher Education and Training (DHET) and are administered under applicable DHET policies and legislation. The same document (UNISA, 2023b) informed that the college offers a diverse range of formal qualifications, with 90 000 teachers in training, enrolled. Qualifications include undergraduate degrees, higher certificates, higher diplomas, postgraduate certificates, honours degrees, postgraduate diplomas, and master's and doctoral degrees. In addition to formal qualifications, the college provides short learning programmes (SLPs), which are classified as non-formal qualifications. SLPs promote lifelong learning and serve to update or expand learners' skills and knowledge in specific areas. Furthermore, the concept of recognition of prior learning (RPL) acknowledges that individuals acquire skills, competencies, and experiences throughout their lives. This learning, which may occur outside a formal educational setting, is valued by UNISA, regardless of its source or timing. Individuals may have developed relevant skills and knowledge through workplace training, experiential learning, short courses, or community engagement. RPL enables learners to receive academic credits within formal certificate, diploma, and degree programmes (offered by Unisa), based on a thorough assessment of the level and extent of their prior knowledge. The evaluation of prior learning is conducted against pre-established, prescribed learning outcomes, ensuring that the recognition process is fair and rigorous.

Makgakga and Ngubane-Mokiwa (2021) stated that teacher training courses, such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education and the Bachelor of Education, have distinct phases: the foundation; intermediate; and senior phases, as well as the further education and training phase, which requires student teachers to undertake teaching practice. Combined, these four phases have a total of 78 850 students enrolled. Pre-service teachers are required to engage in a total of 10 weeks of school-based teaching practice, divided into two five-week placements at different schools. The initial two weeks are dedicated to classroom observation, while the remaining eight weeks focus on practical teaching

experiences. In this framework, pre-service teachers engage in online learning before being placed in educational settings for hands-on practice (Pietersen & Langeveldt, 2024). These placements are designed to be diverse, exposing students to various educational contexts with differing resources, learner demographics, and teaching staff. Students are evaluated by a lecturer in person or through flexible learning tools such as Microsoft Teams.

In terms of exams, Makgakga (2024) pointed out that UNISA implemented the take-home exam for the first time in October/November 2020 with the undergraduate student cohorts during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic negatively impacted the economy, and the education sector was no exception. The online examination is currently being used to conduct examinations using flexible learning tools, such as technological devices like computers and mobile phones.

Challenges associated with being a leading ODeL institution

It is important to note that the challenges discussed in this section are well-documented in the literature and was discussed in a previous section. The findings below are distinctive because they reveal how their intensity and consequences are amplified within a large-scale ODeL institution. It is essential to understand these challenges as interconnected features of flexible learning systems operating. The analysed documents revealed five major challenges associated with being a leading ODeL institution, which are discussed in the paragraphs below.

The first challenge stems from the fact that teachers in training at UNISA reported feeling lonely, isolated, and disconnected. Consequently, providing adequate academic support to student teachers is essential in bridging the gap between lecturers and students (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2012; Maja & Motseke, 2021).

The second challenge is that lecturers in flexible learning contexts tend to apply pedagogical approaches that were originally designed for traditional correspondence education. According to Ngubane-Mokiwa (2017), lecturers should not merely upload outdated PDF versions of learning materials onto the MyUnisa online portal. Instead, sufficient pedagogical guidance and detailed explanations should be provided using the available flexible learning tools. It has recently become mandatory for lecturers at UNISA to teach and record lessons using online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Tippytube. To promote inclusivity, lessons are presented in various African languages as well as in sign language.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

The third challenge, according to Naidu and Sevnarayan (2023), is that incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT in online assessments presented HEIs with ethical dilemmas globally. UNISA's flexible learning programmes were no exception. Naidu and Sevnarayan (2023) expressed concern that AI has increased the potential for academic dishonesty and may allow students to access answers without a comprehensive understanding of the content. According to Maurice (2024), UNISA has been proactive in responding to AI-related challenges, as the institution employs software such as Turnitin to detect AI use. UNISA is devoted to promulgating its stance on AI by developing an AI policy awaiting approval. In 2025, UNISA introduced a course on AI's responsible and ethical use.

The fourth challenge reported by Gezani (2024) and Mouton and Subban (2023), is that South African students reported encountering Internet connectivity issues that affect their ability to access flexible learning materials and platforms. Consequently, students experience challenges in accessing the MyUnisa website, attending online classes, and downloading essential learning material. Gezani (2024) further noted that limited Internet access contributes to higher student attrition rates, especially among students residing in rural areas. Furthermore, while students generally understand ODeL, many still face challenges in effectively using online flexible learning materials (Mouton & Subban, 2023). According to Gezani (2024), to mitigate these challenges, UNISA is actively engaging with rural students through initiatives such as mobile Internet buses and the establishment of teacher centre's in underserved regions.

The fifth and last challenge is that CEDU is the largest in terms of the number of students enrolled, however, one of the smallest in terms of staff complement. As a result, lecturers may grapple to provide individualised support to students. Currently, the high student-to-staff ratio is leading to increased workloads for lecturers in the college.

Emerging theory

The emerging theory reveals that flexible teacher education in an ODeL context seeks to balance the demands of expanding access with maintaining educational quality. Flexible learning is not limited to being a technological innovation. It is also a response to pressure such as rapid population growth, resource limitations, historical inequalities, and crisis events. The aforementioned requires adaptable strategies for teacher education. However, the expansion of teacher education introduces challenges related to infrastructure, digital inequality, pedagogical readiness, and student support. Factors such as technological

infrastructure and pedagogical adaptation mediate the effectiveness of flexible learning. This determines whether flexible learning serves as a transformative tool for equitable teacher development or remains a compensatory response that reproduces existing inequalities.

A limitation of the current study is its reliance on document analysis as the sole data source. Although the analysed documents provided important findings, they do not capture the lived experiences of students and staff. Future research should incorporate methods such as interviews and questionnaires to provide an experience-based understanding.

Implications of findings: Lessons learned from UNISA

The contribution of these findings lies in synthesising them into a coherent set of lessons derived from a large-scale institutional context.

The first lesson that can be learned from UNISA is that flexible learning opportunities provided by the institution are essential for marginalised citizens who were historically denied access to higher education. UNISA's model of flexible teacher training programmes has the potential to increase the number of qualified educators in a context where demand is high and resources may be limited.

The second lesson is that regardless of UNISA's commitment, the analysed documents revealed that students still face challenges, such as the reported feelings of loneliness and isolation among student teachers. It is crucial for institutions offering flexible learning opportunities to understand the emotional and social needs of students. A response to this challenge can be grounded in improved communication channels that promote open dialogue between students and lecturers. In addition, implementing tailored academic support services such as mentorship programmes and peer-support networks can assist students in navigating the terrain of flexible education. Furthermore, lecturers should receive ongoing professional development that has the potential to improve their teaching pedagogies in the context of flexible education. To employ technology effectively and maximise its potential, it should be accompanied by clear guidelines and training.

The third lesson is grounded in the fact that UNISA has responded proactively to the ethical challenges associated with AI technology. HEIs across the globe can learn from UNISA in this regard by creating similar frameworks that tackle detection and prevention strategies for academic dishonesty and promote ethical AI use among students and educators. One can learn from UNISA that implementing software such as Turnitin requires HEIs to invest in technology that promotes academic integrity. The planned introduction of a course on responsible and ethical AI use at UNISA is encouraging. The findings have revealed that UNISA is dedicated to bridging the digital divide through outreach initiatives

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

to equip rural students with Internet connectivity. Traditional and flexible HEIs should engage with underserved populations by exploring innovative solutions to provide access to learning materials and support systems.

The last lesson learned is that it is essential for HEIs to solicit feedback from students regarding the challenges they face in accessing flexible learning materials and utilising flexible learning platforms. In response to inadequate Internet connectivity, UNISA could consider collaborating with local Internet service providers to offer subsidised connections. Furthermore, UNISA could strengthen its flexible learning programmes by establishing partnerships with local businesses, libraries, and community centres. The partnership should be grounded in developing accessible learning hubs and providing adequate Internet access. The challenge of inadequate staff requires an urgent balance of student enrolment with staff appointments. There is a need for proactive planning regarding human resources in relation to student numbers. UNISA's human resources department should conduct a needs analysis and hire additional lecturers in CEDU. A promising development from which other institutions can learn, is that many of the newly appointed lecturers in CEDU are under the age of 40.

Building on these context-specific insights, the lessons from UNISA's experience can be distilled into a transferable framework for flexible teacher education grounded in four dimensions. First, institutions should expand access through flexible, technology-enabled learning that reaches marginalised groups. Second, they should provide academic and emotional support. This could include mentorship and strong communication to reduce student isolation. Third, the use of digital tools, including AI, should be guided by clear policies and training. Last, institutions should align staff capacity with enrolment growth and build partnerships with communities and service providers to improve access to resources.

Concluding remarks

The current study highlights that flexible teacher education in Africa is a necessity and a complex undertaking. It is shaped by demographic pressures, economic constraints, historical inequalities, and crisis events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that flexible learning expands access, reduces costs, and offers opportunities for curriculum transformation. However, its effectiveness is constrained by systemic challenges, including digital inequalities, resistance to pedagogical change, and limitations in institutional capacity. A key contribution of this research is grounded in its development of an emerging theory. The substantive theory reported that flexible teacher education is a

balancing act between expanding access and maintaining quality. Flexible teacher education should not be viewed merely as a technological solution. Instead, it is a transformative approach that requires alignment between infrastructure and pedagogy to achieve high-quality education in Africa.

References

Amoah, C., & Le Roux, L. (2025). Students' challenges with online remote teaching and learning in South Africa. *International Journal of Construction Education and Research, 21*(4), 533–553. https://doi.org/10.1080/15578771.2024.2423632

Andrade, M. S. (2023). Pedagogies and practices: An institutional framework for flexible learning. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 23*(5), 106–114.

Aristeidou, M., & Cross, S. (2021). Disrupted distance learning: The impact of Covid-19 on study habits of distance learning university students. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning, 36*(3), 263–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2021.1973400

Aruleba, K., & Jere, N. (2022). Exploring digital transforming challenges in rural areas of South Africa through a systematic review of empirical studies. *Scientific African, 16*, e01190. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sciaf.2022.e01190

Ayentimi, D. T., & Burgess J. (2019). Is the Fourth Industrial Revolution relevant to sub-Sahara Africa? *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management, 31*(6), 641–652.

Azionya, C. M., & Nhedzi, A. (2021). The digital divide and higher education challenge with emergy online learning: Analysis of tweets in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 22*(4), 164–182. https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.1002822

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method.* Berkeley, University of California Press.

Bobyliev,D. Y., & Vihrova, E. V. (2021). Problems and prospects of distance learning in teaching fundamental subjects to future Mathematics teachers. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series, 1840*(1), 012002. https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1840/1/012002

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal,* 9(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Bruggeman, B., Tondeur, J., Struyven, K., Pynoo, B., Garone, A., Vanslambrouck, S. (2021). Experts speaking: Crucial teacher attributes for implementing blended learning in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education, 48*, 100772.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Carrillo, C., & Flores, M. A. (2020). COVID-19 and teacher education: A literature review of online teaching and learning practices. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(4), 466–487.

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine, 7*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches.* 3rd ed. California: SAGE.

De Jager, T. (2024). Student teachers' views on developing practical online art skills during teaching practice. *Teacher Education through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE), 5*, 79–103.

Department of Higher Education and Training. (2013). *White paper for post-school education and training.* https://www.dhet.gov.za/SiteAssets/Latest%20News/White%20paper%20for%20post-school%20education%20and%20training.pdf.

Downes, S. 2023. Newer theories for digital learning spaces. In O. Zawack-Richter & I.Jung (Eds.), *Handbook of open distance and digital education*, (pp 129–146). Springer.

Ellis, V., Steadman, S., & Mao, Q. (2020). "Come to a screeching halt": Can change in teacher education during the COVID-19 pandemic be seen as innovation? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(4), 559–572. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1821186

Faturoti, B. (2022). Online learning during COVID19 and beyond: A human right based approach to internet access in Africa. *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology, 36*(1), 68–90. DOI: 10.1080/13600869.2022.2030027

Gezani, B. (2024). Challenges of online learning in the comprehensive open distance and e-learning context – A case study of the University of South Africa. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 5*(7), 1265–1274. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245716

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New York, Aldine Publishing.

Glover, A., & Hutchinson, S. (2023). Delivering education reform in Wales: A flexible route into teaching. *Education Inquiry*, *14*(4): 442–457. https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2022.2051822

Goode, W. J., & Hatt, P. K. (1952). *Methods in social research.* McGraw-Hill.

Hammersley, A., Tallantyre, F. & Le Cornu, A. (2013). *Flexible learning: A practical guide for academic staff.* York: The Higher Education Academy. Available at: https:// www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/flexible-learning-practical-guide-academic-staff (Accessed on 2 February 2024).

Jackson, E. A. (2020). The use of WhatsApp for flexible learning: Its effectiveness in supporting teaching and learning in Sierra Leone's higher education institutions. *International Journal of Advanced Corporate Learning, 13*(1), 35–47. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3991/ijac.v13i1.11381

Jacobs, L., & Ferreira-Meyers, K. (2024). Teacher education in a flexible higher education environment: Considerations for the future. *Teacher Education Through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE), 5.*

Jevsikova, T., Stupurienė, G., Stumbrienė, D., Juškevičienė, A., & Dagienė, V. (2021). Acceptance of distance learning technologies by teachers: Determining factors and emergency state influence. *Informatica, 32*(3), 517–542. https://doi.org/10.15388/21-infor459

Joan, D. R. (2013). Flexible learning as new learning design in classroom process to promote quality education. *Journal on School Educational Technology, 9*(1), 37–42.

Johanson, L. B., & Karlsen, S. S. (2021). 'The teachers do not see us'. The challenges of teacher education in rural areas. *Education in the North, 28*(2), 46–63.

Jones, B., & Walters, S. (2015). Flexible learning and teaching: Looking beyond the binary of full-time/part-time provision in South African higher education. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning, 3*(1), 61–84.

Kaisara, G., & Bwalya, K.J. (2021). Investigating the e-learning challenges faced by students during Covid-19 in Namibia. *International Journal of Higher Education, 10*(1), 308–318. doi:https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v10n1p308

Letseka, M., & Pitsoe, V. (2012). Access to higher education through open distance learning (ODL): Reflections on the University of South Africa (UNISA). In: R. Dhunpath & R. Vithal (Eds.). *Access to higher education: Under-prepared students or under-prepared institutions?* (pp. 219–234). Pearsons.

Lockee, B. B., & Clark-Stallkamp, R. (2022). Pressure on the system: Increasing flexible learning through distance education. *Distance Education, 43*(2), 342–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2022.2064829

Maja, M. M., & Motseke, M. (2021). Strategies used by UNISA student teachers in teaching English first additional language. In: L. Waller & S. Waller (Eds). *Higher education - New approaches to accreditation, digitalization, and globalization in the age of Covid* (pp. 1–14). Intechopen.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Makgakga, T. P. (2023). Undergraduate students' perceptions of the use of online examinations in an open and distance learning environment. *Progressio, 45,* 1–14. https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-5895/12541

Makgakga, T. P., & Ngubane-Mokiwa, S. (2021). *Reflections on post-conference feedback as a developmental teacher training strategy: Teaching practice supervisors' experiences in an ODL institution*. Unisa press. https://doi.org/10.25159/unisarxiv/000021.v1

Maurice, M. (2024). *Unisa asserts student use of AI is not scandalous.* Rekord. https://www.citizen.co.za/rekord/news-headlines/2024/07/08/unisa-asserts-student-use-of-ai-is-not-scandalous/#:~:text=Unisa%20says%20that%20it%20continues%20to%20use%20AI,investigation%20for%20using%20AI%20technology%20to%20complete%20assignments.

Medlock, C. (2015). *What is a document analysis?* Prezi. Available at: from https://prezi.com/jbo3n31gd4a7/document-analysis/.

Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass.

Mhlongo, S., Mbatha, K., Ramatsetse, B., & Dlamini, R. (2023). Challenges, opportunities, and prospects of adopting and using smart digital technologies in learning environments: An iterative review. *Heliyon, 9*(6), e16348. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16348

Milićević, V., Denić, N., Milićević, Z., Arsić, L., Spasić-Stoković, M., Petkovic, D., ... & Jovanović, A. (2021). E-learning perspectives in higher education institutions. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 166*, 120618. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120618

Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 27*(1), 64–77. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044

Mouton, J., & Subban, M. (2023). The effectiveness of learner support in open distance learning at Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal. *Administratio Publica, 31*(1), 122–149 https://journals.co.za/doi/full/10.10520/ejc-adminpub_v31_n1_a9

Naidu, K., & Sevnarayan, K. (2023). ChatGPT: An ever-increasing encroachment of artificial intelligence in online assessment in distance education. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 13*(3), e202336. https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcmt/13291

Ngubane-Mokiwa, S. A. (2017). Implications of the University of South Africa's shift to open distance e-learning on teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(9), 111–124. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss9/7

Nieuwenhuis, J. (2020). Qualitative research designs and data-gathering techniques. In: K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 80–116). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Okafor, C. (2024). *Top 10 African universities with the highest number of students.* Business Insider Africa. Available at: Top 10 African universities with the highest number of students | Business Insider Africa.

Phejane, M. V. (2022). "The new normal": A case study on the emergent transition towards online teaching and learning in internal medicine and anaesthesiology at the University of the Free State. *Perspectives in Education, 40*(1), 164–78. https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v40.i1.10

Pietersen, D. (2023). Perspectives on dialogue and care in teaching, learning relationships in an everchanging online higher education landscape. *Perspective in Education, 41*(2), 134–150. https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v41i2.6291

Pietersen, D., & Langeveldt, D. (2024). Pre-service teaching and work-integrated learning (WIL) in a diverse and democratic South African school setting: A social theoretical perspective. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education, 16*(3), 208–218. https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v16i3.5985

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bishop, J. (2019). Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say? *Education Policy Analysis Archive, 27*, 38.

Quezada, R. L., Talbot, C., & Quezada-Parker, K. B. (2020). From bricks and mortar to remote teaching: A teacher education programme's response to COVID-19. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 46*(4), 472–483. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1801330

Saidi, R., Sharip, A. A., Rahim, .N. Z., Zulkifli, Z, A., & Zain, S. M. (2021). Evaluating students' preferences of open and distance learning (ODL) tools. *Procedia Computer Science, 179*, 955–961. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2021.01.085

Schatzman L. (1991). Dimensional analysis: Notes on an alternative approach to the grounding of theory in qualitative research. In: D. R.Maines (Ed.), *Social organization and social process* (pp. 303–314). Routledge.

Scherer, R., Howard, S. K., Tondeur, J., & Siddiq, F. (2021). Profiling teachers' readiness for online teaching and learning in higher education: Who's ready? *Computers In Human Behavior., 118*.

South African Government. 2011. *National Development Plan: Vision for 2030 (NDP)*. South African Government. https://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030.

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative research for social scientists.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Suri, H (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal, 11*(2), 63–75. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.3316/QRJ1102063

Tlili, A., Altinay, F., Huang, R., Altinay, Z., Olivier, J., Mishra, S., … & Burgos, D. (2022). Are we there yet? A systematic literature review of Open Educational Resources in Africa: A combined content and bibliometric analysis. *PLOS ONE, 17*(1), e0262615. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262615

Trines, S. (2018). *Educating the masses: The rise of online education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.* World Education News and Reviews. https://wenr.wes.org/2018/08/educating-the-masses-the-rise-of-online-education.

Tripathy, J.P. (2013). Secondary data analysis: Ethical issues and challenges. *Iranian Journal of Public Health, 42*(12), 1478–1479. doi: http://ijph.tums.ac.ir

UNISA. (2022). *Unisa facts and figures 2017-2022.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/static/corporate_web/Content/News%20&%20Media/Announcements/Documents/Unisa%20Facts%20and%20Figures%202017-2022.pdf.

UNISA. (2023a). *College of education.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Education/About-the-college.

UNISA. (2023b). *Qualifications.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Education/Qualifications.

UNISA. (2024a). *A brief history of Unisa.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Unisa-History-and-Memory-Project/Themes/All-themes/A-brief-history-of-Unisa.

UNISA. (2024b). *Timeline introduction.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Unisa-History-and-Memory-Project/Timeline.

UNISA. (2025a). *Schools, departments, centres & institutes.* https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Education/Schools,-departments,-centres-&-instututes.

UNISA. (2025b). *UNISA College of Education 2025-2026.* Available at: https://unisaapplication.com/unisa-college-of-education/#gsc.tab=0.

Van Wyk, M. M., Kotze, C. J., Tshabalala, S. L., & Mukhati, F. (2021). The responsiveness of teacher education managers at an ODel college to resilience and the well-being of staff working from home during COVID-19. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, *7*(4), 623–635. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.7.4.623

Wolhuter, C., & Jacobs, L. (2021). COVID-19, the global education project and technology: Disrupting priorities towards rethinking education. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *6*(2), 96–109. https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.13

Zongozzi, J. N. (2022). Accessible quality higher education for students with disabilities in a South African open distance and e-learning institution: Challenges. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *69*(5), 1645–1657. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912x.2020.1822518

CONTACT: Carlo Emile Daniels. Daniece@unisa.ac.za
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.