

Optimising Service-Learning in Responding to COVID-19 Complexities in Under-Resourced and Contextual Deprived South African Public Schools

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted global educational systems, particularly affecting public schools in South Africa, which faced severe difficulties. In response, a group of BEd Honours in-service teachers enrolled in the EDP40AB (Psychology of Education) course at a South African University of Technology, undertook a small-scale Service-Learning intervention aimed at addressing difficulties in their institutions. Service-learning, presented as a structured and credit-bearing educational experience, allowed these in-service teachers to engage in organised intervention initiatives, designed to alleviate challenges in under-resourced and contextually deprived public schools. This study, rooted in the interpretivist research paradigm, reflects on assessing the 45 students involved in Service-Learning project interventions at the Central University of Technology. The in-service teacher students came forth with various interventions to respond to the educational challenges intensified by the pandemic, which included low student attendance, lack of learning resources, notable learning setbacks, increased learner anxiety, interruption of teaching, and feelings of isolation- issues particularly acute in under-resourced and contextual deprived schools. Through reflective virtual debriefing sessions and analyses of student e-portfolios, a qualitative research methodology demonstrated that the service-learning projects, not only generated insightful ideas and strategies but also assisted teachers and school management teams address the pandemic's impact on the public educational system. The findings support the idea of utilising Service-Learning as an innovative and interactive teaching approach to support marginalised and vulnerable school communities. Overall, the intervention projects yielded valuable insights and strategies for teachers and school management teams in responding to the complexities arising from the pandemic.

Keywords

Service-learning, COVID -19, public schools.