

## Article

# Critical roles of leadership and management to the suffocation of tertiary education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic: A critique of human migration

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**Abstract:** This research explores the coping mechanisms of the tertiary education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic from the point of view of the restricted human migration. The research is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. Interviewing technique and narrative enquiry were employed to generate data pertaining to the restricted human mobility during the Covid-19 pandemic. Out of the population of 25 public higher education institutions, in South Africa, only 2 were conveniently sampled for intensive study on restricted human migration of their employees during the Covid-19 lockdown. This paper is therefore, a case study of 2 public higher education institutions. Research findings revealed that firstly, organisational efficacy took a nosedive during the Covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, there was a controversy of the mandatory immunizations within the migrants. Thirdly, the application of migration segregation aggravated the state of affairs. Fourthly, inhibition of the already planned face-to-face conference attendance crippled the education sector. Lastly, compromising of quality assessment practices particularly at institutions of higher learning was a disservice and disruptions to the education sector. Exemption of the education sector from the suffocation of restrictive health protocols in case of similar Covid-19 pandemics in future is recommended.

**Keywords:** compromise; conference; efficacy; immunization; pandemic; segregation

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## 1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are known to be internationalised and globalised. Despite their geographic location, they are normally home to international scholars as well. The bulk of international scholars are attracted to those institutions on the basis of possessing skills which natives are lacking (Bonani and Feni 2022, Nkwanyama 2022). This appears to be a true nature of every institution of higher learning across the globe, with its capability to recruit the best talent from whatever quarter of the globe. Migration of scholars across the globe is a common phenomenon. As long as a scholar is in possession of valid documentations and is armed with marketable skills, competencies and expertise, he or she could migrate wherever his or her services are in demand with no obstruction. Vividly, the outbreak and emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic came along with a different scenario, affecting every sector of a society inclusive of the higher education institutions. Its outbreak made it difficult for scholars to migrate as they please. Current research relates to the suffocation of the higher education institutions as brought about by the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic together with the introduced restrictive human migration.

Covid had a rippling effect on the functioning and operations of institutions of higher learning. In a South African context, each and every institution of higher learning has in the midst of its teaching and research personnel migrant scholars and students. Contending that there were restrictions of migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic, implies that the higher education sector somewhat suffocated (Netshitsho 2021). The sector started to experience deprivation of what it has been receiving all along, namely, the sharing of rare skills, competencies and expertise imported from foreign countries through migrant scholars and being delivered to the native students through the face-to-face contact in the lecture halls. There were instances when all migrants were released for their homes. They were anticipated to render a teaching and research service as required by their employers being far away to their homes. Bulk of higher education institutions are resident



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institutions and not distance learning institutions. Largely, resident higher education institutions service their students through face-to-face contact or in-schooling learning inside the lecture halls.

The period of Covid-19 pandemic, which occasioned the return of migrants to their original countries was somehow a suffocation to higher education institutions in South Africa who had to rely on the teaching and research service offered by migrants away from their usual workplace (Gumede 2021). Much as migrant scholars rendering the teaching and research service to institutions of higher learning of this country were being inconvenienced by the existence of Covid-19 pandemic, their students as well were greatly impacted negatively. Such students had to adapt from learning face to face from a lecturer to learning remotely or receiving digital educational content. That period of e-schooling although it was helpful, it was on the other side very strenuous to both internal and external stakeholders. Clearly, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic suffocated and inconvenienced the higher education institutions in many respects, including even how assessments of students had to be conducted namely, in a remote fashion. Institutions of higher learning had to respond to the emergence of the pandemic through crafting appropriate management plans of proceeding with their lectures and research with some of their employees having migrated home owing to strict lockdown rules and regulations in this country. It would have been difficult for migrants not to travel back home during the Covid-19 pandemic period when not knowing when will the pandemic be subdued.

For safety and security reasons the bulk of migrants retreated to their countries. That sordid situation suffocated their higher education sectors which they had to continue servicing but not in a usual manner of a face-to-face contact with students but with a distance type of learning as occasioned by the prevalence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Lee 2021b). Apart from this scenario of human migration referring to foreign scholars who could no longer meet their students in a lecture hall through a face-to-face contact, there is another form of restricted human migration. That restricted human migration refers to a situation whereby, even native scholars were not permitted to set their foot in their offices or even meet with students on the grounds of institutions of higher learning. That was a pathetic situation requiring better management in the form of balancing the protection of the academic year of an institution of higher learning and the safety and health of the recipients of teaching and that of other internal stakeholders. Evidently, Covid-19 pandemic imposed a restricted human migration for higher education institutions which led to their suffocation. Owing to that, there was a need for the sound management plans addressing the functioning and operations of the higher education sector in order to comply with the existing health protocols and at the same time ascertaining that an enterprise and mandate of a higher learning institution is never compromised. Vividly, the higher education sector pulled hard during the Covid-19 pandemic. The reasons for such a state of affairs are not far-fetched (Netshitenshe 2021, Nkwanyama 2022). This research explores the coping mechanisms of the higher education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic from the point of view of the restricted human migration.

## 2. Literature Review

Closure of every sector of the economy during the hard lockdown, hit every sector including the education sector hard. That was a set-back for education and the human migration. Eromo (2016) reminds that no nation develops further than the quality of its schooling. The quality of schooling could be generated through placing an apex priority on an ebullient and healthy schooling environment. Under Covid-19 that kind of environment was difficult to create and maintain due to the new normal philosophy. The quality schooling environment has a potential of enabling students to concentrate despite the fear to contract Covid-19 pandemic. The prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic contaminated an ebullient university environment required for successful academic activities. The problem which this paper addresses relates to the suffocation of higher education institutions brought about by the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic as well as the introduced restrictive human migration (Maubane 2021, Mashele 2021). According to a study, how much effective and performing institutions of higher learning molly-coddle lecture hall interactions between students and lecturers is usually beneficial. It is critical for higher education institutions to develop and manage lecturer-student relationships for the sake of the instructional business, especially during the difficult period of the Covid-19 epidemic (Pedersen 2021).

A higher education industry that does not embrace the Covid-19 epidemic as a chance to keep students organised and disciplined is unlikely to deliver exceptional student outcomes. The predominance of functionality and performance, as hampered by the possibility of a pandemic, is critical for providing excellent higher education services to students who are likely to be fascinated with self-improvement and growth, and hence the development and growth of their countries. Struggling higher education sectors, owing to restrictive human migration and the presence of Covid-19, were forced to experiment with reconfiguration in order to adapt to a new normal and continue to operate differently in terms of teaching and research (Siwela 2017, Brown 2021). To be fully functioning and performing, higher education institutions must aim to educate their students for the current century, allowing them to manage in any living circumstance they find themselves in. The tertiary education system must provide students with necessary holistic capabilities fit for this century (Magaela 2021, Makhura 2021a). Transformed higher education institution settings, inspired by the Covid-19 epidemic, have the ability to prepare institutions to appropriately serve students.

That schooling is a societal enterprise and largely people-intensive makes the issue of restrictive human migration during the Covid-19 pandemic difficult to ignore. Where the delivery of educational content to students has been digitalised due to the human migration challenge whereby lecturers were not at liberty to come into face-to-face with students, requires a quick adaptation of both the students and the lecturers. Failure by the two parties to adapt to the new normal as regards the changed methodology of delivering educational content was likely to lead to the educational suffocation of the higher education sector. Managed with conviction, Covid-19 pandemic as worsened by the restrictive human migration factor, was likely to be made to be less severe to the education sector (Netshitenshe 2021). The education sector's failure was mostly due to its inability to respond to the new normal. Higher education institutions that consistently deliver remarkable student results are recognised to be seeking to design personalised strategies for difficult students in order to help and prepare them to compete with their brilliant peers.

This is relevant in the current higher education set-up where Covid-19 pandemic is holding students differently. Such higher education institutions would be regarded to be functional and high performing institutions in view of attempting to cope to the new normal of the lecturing methodology to students (Ramothwala 2021). Functional and performing higher education institutions which frequently put to good use their new normal lecturing methodology, could be aware that learning by students has to be more than just sitting in a lecture hall. Such higher education institutions may be aware that inherited contradictory colonial lecturing structures, as

seen in a variety of higher education institutions, do not always assist tertiary institutions in producing competent and dynamic students capable of coping in an ever-changing world. Well-managed higher education systems that are entrenched in the discussion about the Covid-19 epidemic and controlled human migration have the ability to reverse dysfunctionality and underperformance in some higher education institutions (Siwela 2017, Devenish 2021). Ideally, all higher education institutions should be wary of failing to adapt to the new normal of the Covid-19 epidemic, which includes constraints on the human mobility of intellectuals, academics, and others.

Restrictive human mobility during the Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively the organisational efficacy of higher education institutions. That is why Bambalele (2019) and Makhura (2021b) advise that as part of reverting higher education institutions to their glory days, that is when their efficacy was up for everyone to notice, proactive measures are necessary. In view of some higher education institution's heavy reliance on the imported skills of migrants, where such skills were being restricted, organisational efficacy of many higher education institutions took a nosedive (Gumede 2021, Kgobotlo 2021). Local skills alone, without the complementary skills of migrant scholars and intellectuals were inadequate to maintain the organisational efficacy of the higher education sector. Proactive measures taken by higher education institutions to fill in the skills gap created by the restriction of movements of migrant scholars remained a temporary arrangement.

This is the case because institutions of higher learning operate differently from other education sectors in the sense of largely being universal and highly diversified to the level of their performance and functionality being dependent on the combination of both the local and the imported skills for their optimum and efficacious operation. Prevalence of Covid-19 and its vaccine, impact upon the manner of interaction between higher education institutions and their students (Lee 2021a). Within the Covid-19 pandemic, university offerings needed to be delivered remotely, an arrangement which was a real inconvenience and suffocation for both lecturers and students. Lack of free mobility by migrant scholars exacerbated the situation. On the basis of the restricted mobility of migrant scholars and intellectuals due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the tried and tested organisational efficacy of higher education institutions took a nosedive. This was for the simple reason that the personnel known to be carrying out the mandate of the higher education institution were being greatly impacted by the physical unavailability of some of the personnel who were possessing imported skills for students (Allen 2014, Dlamini 2021a).

Current research postulates that the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic suffocated the higher education sector considering that the pandemic led to the restricted movement of personnel some of whom were migrant scholars. In some instances, the higher education sector was suffocated more by the introduction of the controversial mandatory immunizations for the migrants (Magaela 2021). Intentions of the immunizations was to ascertain that migrant scholars never ended up being the super-spreaders of the Covid-19 pandemic from their own countries to the country they were getting to for an employment opportunity. Literature is not mute on the fact that that not all people respond in a similar fashion to inoculations. By virtue of people possessing diverse immune systems, it would have been prudent for governments to suggest something different other than adopting mandatory immunisation against the spread of Covid-19 pandemic (Tabane 2021). Existence of the mandatory immunization system especially for migrants has led to the further suffocation of the higher education sector.

This came about largely in two ways. In one of the ways, some highly valuable migrant scholars lost their lives upon attempting to comply with the injunction of first immunising prior to being permitted to travel within their own countries and that where they were employment. The other way through which the higher education sector was suffocated was when the indispensable migrant scholars, knowing that their immune systems were not going to cope with the mandatory immunisation, opted to keep a distance from vaccinations and thus prevented from migrating. That had a dire consequence for higher education institutions that granted those migrants employment (Gumede 2021). Higher education sector was dealt a heavy blow by the prevalence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Tshikalange 2021). The mere existence of Covid-19 pandemic in higher education institutions was their first inconvenience or suffocation. The other suffocation was when holders of imported skills, namely, the migrant scholars were being put under pressure to either immunise or get no permission to proceed to their country of employment. Institutions of higher learning found themselves between the rock and the hard place (Olivier 2012, Dlamini 2021b).

Obstructing the free human movement during the Covid-19 pandemic was more of a tragedy for the higher education sector than many realises. For instance, a Covid-19 vaccine or immunisation which was hoped to be a panacea for the nation, ended up contributing to the suffocation of the education sector. There are for instance, migrant scholars who due to their desires to safeguard their jobs in foreign lands, submitted themselves to inoculation which never handled them as expected. To date some of them have not yet recovered completely from the side effects of their immunisation decisions (Makhura 2021c). In view of those migrants possessing rare and scarce skills which are locally not available, the ill-health of those migrants prevents them from delivering the world-class service, they have been recruited and appointed for. This becomes an unfortunate state of affairs (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2010). Vividly, the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic in the world somewhat introduced a migration segregation. The already shared scenario of migrant scholars and intellectuals having first to immunise prior to their mobility being allowed, is a confirmation thereto.

The Covid-19 criteria clearly separate one higher education institution from the others in terms of student service and performance. Educationally, supplying students with what they need and aspire to can have a significant impact on their ability to compete favourably with students from other institutions in terms of student outcomes. On that premise, regulating the Covid-19 schooling environment may be sufficient to achieve mouth-watering organisational efficacy, irrespective of the human migration situation (Levin 2011, Southey 2012). Many higher education institutions battled with adjustment to suffocation as occasioned by the restricted mobility of personnel expected to move the enterprise of the education sector forward (Coetzee et al. 2011, Bodibe 2012, Memela 2012). Exquisite management of the Covid-19 pandemic by the higher education sectors was likely to enable them to cope in responding appropriately to dealing with suffocation of the sector due to the new normal which the entire higher education sector just like other sectors had to learn to live with (Magaela 2021).

Another form through which the higher education sectors were suffocated was the inhibition of holding the face-to-face conferences (Qwen 2015, Khaas 2021). It is common practice for institutions of higher learning to hold face to face conferences as another manner of knowledge generation and exchange. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic turned things upside down. Face-to-face conferences were for a while placed in abeyance. This emerged to be a serious setback for institutions of higher learning whose survival among others hinge upon an encounter of scholars to compare notes on academia and thus to learn from one another. The

prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic saw face to face conference being replaced with virtual conferences. That was a handicap and a suffocation for higher education institutions owing to their deviation from how they normally held their conferences. The reality is that with face-to-face conferences, attendees benefitted from diverse experiences of being together physically, something which virtual conferences lacked. The review of literature unveils that one of the points standing out from the face-to-face conferences, something missing in digitally held conferences is the original feeling and flair of academics and others sharing a practical space in flesh. The spirit and atmosphere prevailing in that kind of an environment is simply irreplaceable. But Covid-19 pandemic came and made that manner of human engagement obsolete and directed everyone to virtual form of engagement (Equal Education 2018, Meador 2019, Hosken and Keeton 2021).

Considering that when Covid-19 pandemic broke out, some conference arrangements were at an advanced state, having to re-schedule those conferences had monetary implications and other inconveniences. If that is not the suffocation of the higher education sector, what will that then be? There are scholars and academics who prefer to address conferences in person and being with the delegates in flesh in a practical conference space. The narrative been driven here is that any form of conference holding other than a face to face one, is likely to miss the real element of common touch within the delegates, something which Covid-19 pandemic and its introduction of restrictive human movement have delivered to the present way of doing things. What a real suffocation, deviation and digression from the usual normal to a new normal. Apart from being suffocated by the new manner of conference holding, the higher education sector is further experiencing deviation on how assessments of students are being conducted. Prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, any form of assessing students required that they show up at a particular venue for assessment purposes. However, Covid-19 pandemic have rendered that manner of conducting the higher education sector business somewhat obsolete and worth replacing. That has been done but to the peril of students and institutions of higher learning (Keeton et al. 2021).

The current practised online manner of assessment is not found to be reliable. This is a predicament to overcome in the form of reverting to how assessments have all along been conducted in higher learning institutions in a physical space with both students and an invigilator there to ascertain the integrity and decency of assessments. The witnessed human migration hurdle could pose a challenge to assessing students like in the past. There is likely to be a shortage of invigilators basing everything on the point that there are migrant scholars whose mobility have severely been affected by the existing Covid-19 pandemic and its concomitant health protocols. For some of those migrants, it could be a hurdle for them to leave their own countries for a country of employment to conduct credible assessments with their students owing to immunisation requirements and other discriminatory practices directed at them. Lara (2019) and Kgoboto (2021) assert that an appropriately recreated and refashioned higher education institutions, have a potential of converting students to cope with the new normal of Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictive human mobility practice being experienced the world over (Gqirana 2016, Juan 2017, Lee 2021a). The higher education sector is so much complex such that at times making predictions with regard to how long will the sector persists to experience the human mobility challenge, could be difficult to make reliably. There is the multiplicity of factors in higher education institutions, that explain the suffocation witnessed. This issue of a variety of factors contributing to the inconvenience and suffocation engulfing the higher education sector implies that adequate attention must be paid to the resolution of the skills shortage, which leads to its importation, which has for the time been associated with the human mobility problem (Walz 2006, Zhu et al. 2011). (Ramathan 2017, Dlodla 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic, it took a well-managed higher-education institution operating in an enabling environment to convert ordinary students into super students, with or without human migration barriers (Masondo 2015, Hosken 2021, Kayana 2021, Keeton et al. 2021).

### 3. Objectives and the research question

This research investigates the coping mechanisms of the tertiary education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic from the point of view of the restricted human migration. The second objective relates to probing the disruption of the in-school learning by the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic to the higher education sector. On the basis of the expressed objectives, the research question guiding this paper is: In what way could the suffocation of the higher education sector through the restricted human migration be mitigated? Ongoing human mobility restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to shake the organisational efficacy of myriad higher education institutions (Equal Education 2018, Meador 2019, Lee 2021b).

#### 3.1 Research Design

It was a qualitative case study aimed to address the suffocation of the higher education sector as a result of limited people mobility during the Covid-19 epidemic. Exploration of higher education institutions' coping techniques during the Covid-19 epidemic, necessitates that it uses a qualitative research paradigm rather of a quantitative one. The choice of qualitative research approach was prompted by the fact that this article is based on Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy (Moloi 2005, Khamango 2021). The researcher noticed a necessity to build a synergy between the two indicated theoretical views, with the qualitative approach serving as the primary study methodology in this work. The combination of the three was extremely useful in highlighting issues such as Covid-19 and limited human movement, as well as how they contribute to the suffocation of higher education institutions (Clark 2010, Equal Education 2018, Magaela 2021).

The research used theoretical perspectives to analyse the coping strategies of the higher education sector during the Covid-19 epidemic via the lens of limited human movement. The aforementioned theoretical approaches were used to investigate the interruption of in-school learning caused by the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic in the higher education sector. Combining interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy within the qualitative research paradigm aimed at maximising the strengths of the three perspectives in order to fully comprehend the contribution of limited human migration to the suffocation of the higher education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ramathan 2017, Kismayo 2021). The combination of the three also allowed the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of how, despite many years of existence, many institutions of higher learning were so easily disrupted in terms of in-school learning due to restrictions on human mobility during the Covid-19 pandemic. Such in-depth knowledge is required to function from an educated stance about the ongoing interruptions of e-school learning amid the Covid-19 epidemic. Two of South Africa's 26 higher education institutions were conveniently sampled for this article. A smaller sample size is acceptable in qualitative investigations, especially when doing a case study (Cresswell 2009).

This work is a case study paper focussing on two higher education institutions and their suffocation caused by restricted people movement during the Covid-19 epidemic. Narrative inquiry and interviewing procedures were used to collect data for this paper. To be more specific, three lecturers from each of the sampled higher education institutions were given the opportunity to narrate from their own perspectives on how they believe restricted human mobility contributed to the suffocation of their higher education institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The same six lecturers from the two higher education institutions were interviewed on the suffocation of their educational sectors during the Covid-19 epidemic (Madonsela 2021). The primary goal of conducting interviews was to validate and triangulate data gained from the narrative inquiry. Interviews were only performed with research participants who supplied narrative inquiry. Overall, six study participants were questioned about their thoughts on the suffocation of their higher education institutions as a result of restricted human migration. Interview replies were audiotaped for transcription later on. Both narrative inquiry and interviews were useful in gathering information about the suffocation of higher education institutions during the Covid-19 era (Meador 2019, Keeton et al. 2021).

The findings presented in this study are relevant to the research issue, which is researching the coping mechanism of the higher education sector during the Covid-19 epidemic from the perspective of limited human mobility. The conclusions are based on the examined data, which were obtained using the narrative inquiry and interviewing techniques. The responses of the six research participants were examined in terms of the suffocation of the higher education industry as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions on human movement. To discuss and share the findings in a concise and unambiguous manner, the six research participants interviewed in this paper have been referred to as Respondent A, Respondent B, and Respondent C, meaning lecturers from the first sampled University, and Respondent D, Respondent E, and Respondent F, referring to lecturers from the second sampled University. This was done to safeguard the true identity of the research participants. The researcher selected research respondents for interviews in the area of suffocation in higher education institutions during the Covid-19 period because they had personal experiences with the problem under research and investigation (Botha 2017, Juan and Visser 2017, Lara 2018, Meador 2019, Bush et al. 2019, Makamedi 2021). Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy, in collaboration with the qualitative research paradigm, have proved sufficiently useful in aiding with data analysis to provide these results. The findings and discussion for this study are as follows: Organisational efficacy taking a nosedive, mandatory immunisation, application of migration segregation, inhibition of face-to-face conference attendance and compromising of quality assessment practices.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Organisational efficacy taking a nosedive

Managing an education organisation like a higher education sector remotely will always be different from leading and regimenting it face to face in physical contact with institutional incumbents. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the adaptation of myriad higher education institutions to online management and leadership of the personnel and other organisational resources. The existence of the restricted human migration during the Covid-19 pandemic meant that in-site management and leadership of the education sector was disrupted and had to be replaced with the digital form of managing and leading (Kuseka 2008, Mkize 2021, Moodey 2021). That forced change to the higher education institutions, had a negative impact on the accustomed functionality and performance of countless institutions of higher learning. Hence one of the findings in this paper relates to organisational efficacy taking a nosedive during the Covid-19 pandemic. On this very same issue, Respondent E of University 2 pronounces that *“the impact of the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic to how the higher education sector has been organised and made to perform and function, prior to the emergence of the pandemic is currently very distinct, an indication that something unexpected is arresting the envisaged brilliant organisational efficiency and effectiveness of the past”*. On the said matter, Respondent C of University 1 concurs that *“good student results which were being produced by the higher education sector before 2019 are becoming difficult to replicate since the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic particularly ever since there were restrictions with regard to the free migration of the higher education personnel”*. Respondent A of University 1 shares that *“comparison of the workings of higher education institutions currently and prior to the appearance of Covid-19 pandemic is providing a very different picture of education organisations in the main, presently pulling hard to continue to produce impressive and defensible quality student results like in the past”*. Views of the mentioned research participants are confirming the fact that under the Covid-19 pandemic organisational efficacy in institutions of higher learning have taken a nosedive. One of the causative factors could be the absence of the common-touch element within the organisational incumbents which has an influence on the type of institutional results produced (Bernstein and McCarthy 2011, Mgxashe 2011, Mueller 2011, Makhura 2021a).

### 4.2 Mandatory immunisation

In civilised democracies, issues of health remain very personal and under no circumstances could the citizenry be compelled to offer themselves to an inoculation against their will. The appearance of covid-19 pandemic and its concomitant restricted human movement have brought miracles in this world. In higher education institutions there are restrictions of movements until and unless people have been exposed to certain inoculations (Mogotlane 2021, Mokgathe 2021, Okechukwu 2021). That is why one of the findings in this paper relates to mandatory immunisation as a pre-requisite for some migrant scholars to vacate their own counties to enter their country of employment. Respondent F of University 2 contends that *“in view of human immune systems of the citizenry being diverse, it looks like the violation of the rights of migrant scholars to make it mandatory for them to immunise against the Covid-19 pandemic prior to being allowed to set their foot in their host country or country of employment”*. Respondent D of the same University emphasises that *“the period of Covid-19 pandemic was indeed an epoch in the history of human kind where in many instances, logic appeared to be deserting nearly all mortals, something visible when getting a protection against the Covid-19 pandemic was somewhat made mandatory disregarding that the citizenry were not likely to react in the same fashion upon being vaccinated”*. Respondent E of University 2 agrees that *“everything else done by governments of this world appear to have been correct and sane, but one decision which almost surprised everyone was making inoculation against Covid-19 pandemic mandatory especial within the education sector as part of setting conditions regarding which migrant scholars were at liberty to travel within their countries and those countries seeking their imported rare skills”*. Views of research participants in this paper are an indicative of how much mandatory immunisation

by countries, continues to be an albatross around the necks of myriad migrant scholars and intellectuals. The reviewed literature on mandatory inoculation unveils that the majority of the citizenry across the counties is in favour of availing themselves voluntarily to immunisation other than being compelled to do so (Clarke 2009, Fomunyam 2017, Meador 2019, Lee 2021, Mashele 2021).

#### 4.3 Application of migration segregation

In the universe of its creator, it is puzzling that freedom of movement for some people is been curtailed through the application of some tricks. One astonishing means which some institutions of higher learning found themselves applying to curtail the free movement of its migrant employees, was through putting proof of inoculation as one of the pre-conditions for those providing imported skills to set their foot in their countries of employment (Gqirana, 2016 & Lara, 2018). Views solicited from the research participants on the application of segregation against migrant scholars are indeed heartrending. For instance, Respondent A of University 1 proclaims that *“I do not for a moment align myself with a pre-condition of immunisation either by a migrant scholar or a national of an employing country for the simple reason that whether one has vaccinated against Covid-19 or not, has always to be left to the conscience of an individual, and never be forced upon any person in this time and era of rights, the existence of Covid-19 pandemic notwithstanding”*. Respondent D of University 2 reports that *“as long as there is no conclusive proof and evidence that getting inoculated will safeguard one against being infected with Covid-19 pandemic and dying, there will then be no basis for the application of segregation against migrant scholars as a form of restricting their free movement of selling their marketable skills to countries interested in those rare skills”*. Respondent E of University 2 remarks that *“the period of Covid-19 has been overwhelming to almost everyone judging from the kinds of decisions which countries of the world took out of desperation wherein, the movement of migrant scholars were curtailed through the requirement of immunisation against the Covid-19 pandemic prior to being allowed to leave one’s country and land, in another”*. As per the shared views, research participants are openly expressing revulsion against the application of segregation against migrant scholars whose livelihoods hinge upon moving around the globe marketing their hard earned requisite skills (Mkhabela 2011, Ramphela 2011, Xiadong 2021).

#### 4.4 Inhibition of face to face conference attendance

Expressing reservations to attending conferences virtually as against attending them in a physical space with delegates, is not about refusing to embrace change but a comparison of how the latter exudes the real conference feeling. Regular conference attendees have been missing the usual way of conference holding prior to the intrusion of the Covid-19 pandemic (Modiba 2012, Mangalothi 2021). During the tough and hard lockdown period of Covid-19 pandemic, nearly all conferences took a virtual mode. That was no doubt the suffocation of the higher education sector due to having to adapt to a new normal of conference holding. On this issue of prohibited face to face conference attendance by delegates, Respondent F of University 2 laments that *“any form of conference which higher education institutions were compelled to hold virtually, may require to be reconvened during the post-Covid-19 pandemic for the simple reason that delegates of those conferences may have not tasted the beauty of a conference in a physical space with delegates seeing one another in flesh not through digital technology”*.

Respondent B of University 1 suggests that *“the beauty of a conference does not so much lie in delegates communicating with one another through technological gargets but in delegates experiencing a free state of their minds by virtue of congregating in one space to exchange ideas and compare notes on wide ranging issues of scholarly interest and benefit for the development of their institutions of higher learning and their country”*. On the above matter, Respondent D of University 2 notes that *“under the Covid-19 pandemic, the higher education sector suffocated immensely considering that one of the key occasions that presents a platform for scholars and academics to generate knowledge and to benchmark how far are they pursuing academia with aplomb, was being handled and held virtual instead of in its usual and normal way, namely, in a physical space where delegates mingle with one another to enjoy a stress-free setting away from their daily confining and arresting workspaces”*. Views of research participants are an indicative of how much they have been missing the traditional way of holding conferences not this new way introduced by the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic, which in the main is inhuman and largely for compliance purposes other than for the fun of learning and enjoying attendance of a conference (Walz2006, Mabote 2008, Botha 2017, Makhura 2021b, Sifile 2021, Mdhlela 2024).

#### 4.5 Compromising of quality assessment practices

Delivering lectures to students, either face to face or through an online platform, culminate with the performance of assessments whose purpose are a determination as to whether students do comprehend those lectures or not. Institutions of higher learning are educational organisations of traditions. This signifies that they are comfortable to carry out some of their academic activities in a particular familiar manner which is tried and tested (Gae 2016, Makhura 2021c, Maubane 2021). One of those academic activities is the performance of assessments, be they formative or summative. Traditionally, higher education institutions prefer to have candidates in a physical venue for the conduction of assessments of integrity and credibility. However, the appearance of Covid-19 pandemic, turned things around for institutions of higher learning, where for the first time institutions of higher learning had to be venturesome and experiment with online assessments. Nearly all of them were forced to embrace a new mode of assessment with students which is the online platform. As expected, that new mode of assessing candidates remotely had its own shortcomings which led to the suffocation of the higher education sector.

As a remedy, upon noticing that Covid-19 pandemic has subsided, the bulk of the education sector reverted to their traditional manner of assessment which is where students have to congregate in a physical space in the midst of an invigilator to take assessments. On the shared issue, Respondent C of University 1 notes that *“it was not going to take long before institutions of higher learning reverted to their tried and tested manner of assessing candidates, namely, allowing them in a single space with an invigilator and ascertaining that none was applying any incriminating material to assist her with the relevant answers something which there is no guarantee if it were not happening when assessments were still done remotely”*. Respondent F of University 2 reasons that *“in all fairness all assessments that were conducted when there was a Covid-19 pandemic, if time was allowing, they were supposed to be redone because in the first place, they covered a minimal scope secondly, the kinds of questions asked to candidates were in the main not to the required standard and worse, there are instances were some of the ICT technicians who were claiming to be assisting with online assessments, ended up seeing the questions in advance, and sharing them with students prematurely”*. On how much institutions of higher learner were suffocated during the Covid-19 pandemic, Respondent C of University 1 reminds that *“much of what has earned a label of being*

an assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic within the online assessment terminology, cannot in a true sense of a word be such for it was a little bit below a standard of how a university assessment has to look like". Vividly, views of research participants are unanimous in admitting that assessments conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic in most of the institutions of higher learning were to say a least, a mediocre (Turner 2000, Bambalele 2019, Motaung 2021, Nkengasong 2021).

## 5. Impact on Islamic Thought and Iranian Society

### 5.1 Contributions to Modern Islamic Thought

There is a need for the higher education institutions to be exempted from the suffocation or inconvenience of restrictive health protocols that impact on their efficacious operations particularly as human mobility is been restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, there is a need to keep inoculation of higher education incumbents never mandatory as that compels incumbents to vaccinate against their wishes and will. The application of segregation as regards migrant scholars has to be rescinded in order to uphold their inoculation rights exactly as it is been done with native scholars. Face-to-face conferences should be allowed in order to salvage the pride, practice and culture of institutions of higher learning of robust face to face engagement with fellow academics as a process of knowledge generation for dissemination thereafter. Finally, there is a need for institutions of higher learning to restore their tried and tested manner of assessing students in order that their images and reputations are not tarnished through persisting with online assessments of students whose public reception is in dubious state. This is necessary considering that institutions of higher learning are given funding amongst others, when able to outnumber competitors in attracting students and with verifiable throughput and output.

## 6. Conclusion

Both the analysis of literature and the theoretical frameworks are crucial in addressing the research's conclusions. The narrative inquiry and interviewing approaches, as well as the theoretical viewpoints, gave a stronger foundation for locating and comprehending the full manuscript. Small wonder that the higher education sector had to attempt coping mechanisms such as resorting to the digital delivery of educational content to students during the Covid-19 period, as a way of mitigating the suffocation created by the restricted human migration to institutions as a result of the existence of the pandemic. To sum up, in the context of probing the disruption of the in-school learning by the prevalence of the Covid-19 pandemic to higher education institutions. Covid-19 pandemic has always been destructive to the emotional well-being hence the suffocation experienced in higher education institutions.

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