



EFFSC STATEMENT ON THE EXTENDED LOCKDOWN, ADOPTION OF E-LEARNING AND MESSAGE TO STUDENTS

13 April 2020, Monday

ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS STUDENTS COMMAND STATEMENT ON THE EXTENDED LOCKDOWN, ADOPTION OF E-LEARNING AND MESSAGE TO STUDENTS

The EFFSC notes and welcomes the announcement by the President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa to extend the country's nationwide lockdown by a further two weeks beyond the initial lockdown. This extension will help curb the spread of the Corona virus pandemic, reduce infections and help us in flattening the curve. We call on all South Africans, people living in our country and the student populace, to comply with all the lockdown regulations so that together we defeat this virus.

As products of a Anglo-Dutch colonial society, suffering the socioeconomic and political effects of the Apartheid dispensation, Black students remain the most vulnerable members of the student community. Exploring the realities that come with this historic fact, we will consider the social, economic and academic implications of our reality.

The South African society is defined by landlessness which manifests in high unemployment, gross poverty and inequality with a huge chunk of citizens living below the bread line. We can never underestimate the impact of this socially designed poverty on our students, who still suffer the effects of the Group Areas Act from the past oppressive regime. We must also note that majority of these students, as has been argued by many before us, stay in small, congested and overcrowded homes, which make it impossible to even open a book. As such, the burdens of e-learning on these students should never be undermined. And we must stand together in solidarity as majority of our constituency fall within this category.

Economically, the reality of South Africa's wealth and income inequality need not be reiterated; it is well documented. The reality is that the students in question will pay the highest price for a rushed and poorly organised e-learning system, while they can ironically afford to do so least. The realities of restricted access to information and services will make it extremely difficult for Guardians to support an online learning black child within their household. This will also add an unnecessary financial strain on an already under capacitated household budget. We will never sit back and allow a situation where these students and their families carry the economic burden of a natural disaster. Never! This is the duty of the state and its tertiary institutions, and an opportunistic and cowardice shift of this responsibility will be radically opposed by the EFFSC.



Finally, we must note that academic progression and qualification acquisition is a matter of life and death for these students. This is mainly because them becoming professionals and securing decent employment, is the last hope for their families climbing out of the pool of poverty. A ridiculously designed e-learning model such as the one being proposed by the state currently will not be enough. In fact, it will be disastrous. We will not allow students to walk into a trap of participating in a system that will result in their failure. We will not allow an engineered increase in the dropout rate. We will not allow a discrimination of students, and as such, will never allow the materialisation of a situation that will destroy the future of South Africa's young people on the basis of their poverty.

The sentiments to be expressed in this statement will unpack the position of the EFFSC on how best to limit the possibly disastrous implications highlighted above from occurring.

Electronic Learning

Is about using information and communication technology (ICT) to expand access to education for the purpose of enhancing and transforming teaching and learning. It is a continuum of adjacent elements whose extremes are quite distinct, ranging from face-to-face learning with the support of ICT to a fully online distance learning where all teaching is technology mediated. It is a modern paradigm of the higher learning education that is largely utilised by first-world countries. In this type of learning, electronic devices (laptops, smartphones, and iPads) are used to in place of physical contact classes. However, it is a phenomenon whose course and explanation is questionable due to its sophisticated intrinsic nature, particularly in African countries who are, in majority, underdeveloped and lacking the necessary technological support to facilitate this idiosyncratic form of pedagogical practice.

Moreover, there are institutional inadequacies relating to the use of this form of technology in higher institutions which include lack of strategy, lack of institutional policies that will regulate this environment, lack of technology equipment and conducive facilities. This is precisely predicate to the inevitable fact that educational technology has no specific position in the strategic plan of universities and colleges, there's no defined framework (basic structures to underlay the system) and models for the use of educational technology in both universities and colleges. Thus, this kind of learning demands intricate research and scrutiny to its outlook, a clear consideration on how to design the course, the structure, dialogues and the autonomy to building into the courses bearing in mind that this form of learning is in essence about integrating technology to enhance and transform teaching and learning, while minimising transactional distance and thereby maximising learning outcomes.

In facilitating this caliber of learning, several factors ought to be taken into consideration, factors which include but not limited to human factor, Infrastructure, culture, pedagogy and support. Human factor is paramount because it speaks to the question of preparedness of the critical element that compose it, and that is the lecturer and the students, because if



not scrutinized meticulously, it will breed cobra effects, in terms of its effectiveness since it will just be about non-physical presence of students and lecturers but lacking substance to produce the desired telos.

Furthermore, e-learning distinct from the normal blended learning in the case of universities and traditional physical classes in the case of colleges in the sense that, it is a transition from a transmission model of education, where teachers are primarily the dispensers of information and learners are passive recipients to a model in which electronic technologies are used to promote collaboration with peers via online platforms, asynchronous self-directed learning, active engagement with content and ultimately the creation of new content. It's implementation requires a well-coordinated blueprint, a thorough learning management system (LMS) that will be able to schedule various participants, launch courses and track attendance, record and generate reports, notify participants and managers of achievements and areas that need more attention, allow for electronic collaboration and make group work possible via web conferencing and discussion forums, avail course materials in digital format, allow for students to study at their own pace, and be sufficiently compatible to cater for electronic coaching from lecturers. So in essence, e-learning is that part of the continuum that begins when technology is used to phase out contact teaching to a point where online distance learning is fully achieved.

The EFFSC as a vanguard students' movement, noting that:

- The practical possibility of the lockdown that it must be for a period of at least 3 months to thoroughly flatten the curve. And even longer should there be a lack efficiency of managing the pandemic, which we anticipate will be the case;
- South Africa, its Basic and Higher education by extension remain highly unequal;
- Students have no sustainable access to infrastructure and other resources for e-learning;
- The attempts by the Ministries of Basic and Higher Education to mitigate the realities and provide holistic solutions;
- That Vice Chancellors and TVET heads remain in constant contact with each other to ensure that they play their part meticulously without fail;
- Student organizations and unions commit and contribute towards positive progress;
- Private service providers of cellular networks are approached;
- A financial strain on the government's budget and national economy exists;



- Various other realities:

Demands that:

1) The government gives tertiary institutions a more central role, and more responsibilities in helping curve this crisis. It can't be that we are in a crisis and the intelligencia sector is cowering in a corner. Research towards finding a homemade cure/vaccine for this virus is arguably the most essential, and the facilities and human resources of tertiary institutions must be made to advance this research.

2) Cellular network service providers must play a central role in the development of an accessible and efficient online learning village/platform. It is utter laziness and incompetence for them to merely zero-rate certain sites. This is definitely not enough, we are in a global crisis here, and their resources must be redirected to providing a lasting impact.

3) In line with the principle of 33% donations to the Covid-19 Solidarity Fund by state officials and EFF public officials, the EFFSC is calling on the following financial interventions from tertiary institutions (imposed by state regulations where necessary and resisted):

a) All members of senior management and council in tertiary institutions must follow suite and donate 33% of their income towards institutional funds that will assist their students.

b) All SRC budgets - or at least 70% - must be redirected towards this institutional fund, as we anticipate the will no longer be needed. The EFFSC in institutions where we are in charge will ensure we lead and expedite this process.

c) All tertiary institutions must dig into their Reserve/Disaster Funds and redirect no less than 10% towards this institutional fund.

* Note that the EFFSC is not calling for these moneys to be donated to the Covid-19 Solidarity Fund, but for institutions to set up institution-based funds to supplement the efforts of the state in rolling out e-learning. We are not prescribing a blanket approach for how this money must be used as institutional dynamics differ. But we stress that it must be used to provide direct assistance to students such as procuring gadgets for all students (laptops, smart phones, etc.), contributing towards the development of hygiene and management systems for proposed community student centre's, etc. Each institution must set up a task team/committee comprising of members of council, management and SRCs to manage these funds and ensure they are used properly. These teams must report weekly on their work via the institutional communication platforms and be subject to strict audits. A center

4) Ensure that all university support staff - particularly those who work through labour brokers - are paid their salaries in full for the duration of the lockdown. We reiterate our rejection of labour broking, but table this demand as means to mitigate prevailing circumstances.



5) NSFAS to continue paying students their monthly allowances and for tertiary institutions to commit to - through their Reserve/Disaster Funds - adding an additional 10% of what NSFAS pays. This is due to the fact that majority of our students are living in abject poverty, and their stipends is the only source of income to which their families rely. We call on institutions to be weary of and sensitive towards the realities of their students.

6) An addressal of the five factors to consider in e-learning, which are;

Human factor
Infrastructure
Culture
Pedagogy
Support

Under Human factor we demand that

- holding/conducting of training courses (pre the implementation of e-learning for both lectures and students particularly first years in universities and the entire TVET sector)

Under infrastructure we demand the state unconditionally,

- Consider centers that can be accessible to students in various districts
- Adopt laws to regulate the e-learning project develops and strengthens communication networks
- Develop an online library

Under culture we demand the state;

- Develop mechanisms for monitoring the activities of teaching and learning in the e-learning environment

Under pedagogy we call for the state to;

- hold training courses for teachers of content

Under support we call for;

- Allocations and spending of appropriate budget
- producing of electronic content



7) We further call for an educational consortium inclusive of vice chancellors, ministry of education, portfolio committee of higher education, educational, and student political organisations in the space and the business council to discuss transition and academic roll out of any ministry strategy.

The EFFSC will during the course of this week, unpack the practicalities, implementations and implications of these demand. But for now, we call on the parties implicated to start thinking around them. Formal communiqué to this effect is in the pipeline and will be communicated at a necessary time.

Moreover, we would like to take this opportunity to plead with all EFFSC Branches, particularly the Branch Student Command Teams (BSCTs), to use their official organisational social media platforms to update and keep students and their constituencies informed about what's happening with regards to the coronavirus pandemic in our country; how students can stay safe; encourage students to keep pursuing their Academics and studying; and most revolutionary, to make time to read political literature and equip themselves with political education.

Similarly, since we are living in the era of fake news, we call on all our Fighters who are at their respective homes to use this opportunity to educate our parents, elders and community members about what the Coronavirus is and how best we can protect ourselves from it. We are first members of the community before we are students.

The EFFSC leadership believes by doing all the above mentioned plans of action, we will be promoting all our non-negotiable founding principles of the EFF Student Command, which are championing the interests of students and workers in institutions of higher learning; building a dynamic relationship between students and community struggles and campaigns; and promoting academic and research excellence & progress; just to mention a few.

Let's continue to stay at home. Let's practice good and safe hygiene. Let's educate one another. Let's save lives. Together we shall overcome.

No Retreat. No Surrender. Victory Is Certain. Hasta la Victoria Siempre.

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