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Structural Implications of Digital Device Usage During Emergency Online Learning: A Case of a South African University

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ABSTRACT Digital devices are at the same time a tool for social collaboration, individual learning resource and can also be a valuable utility for higher education to develop and promote new teaching and learning models during and post pandemic. The objective of the study was to investigate the negative ramifications of digital devices purchased during online sessions at a rural university in Gauteng, South Africa. This study adopted a retrospective facility based review approach for the period January to May 2021. The respondents of this study consisted of registered undergraduate and postgraduate students for the 2021 academic calendar. The study findings revealed that of the 750 procured laptop brands, 315 laptops were returned to the information communication and technology, student technical support service department, 292 (92.7%) were CNX brand, followed by 15 (4.76%) AS brand, and the laptops, which were least returned were 8 (2.54%) LNV brands. The issues associated with the various laptop brands were battery failure 209 (66.35%), and hardware failure 42 (13.33%). The study concludes that the university should have a purchasing team inclusive of the information communication and technology and computer science in field experts for the laptop brands to safeguard the efficiency of online learning during the pandemic. Findings from this paper are expected to play a key role for information communication and technology policy implementation and evaluation of digital device usage during online sessions and other university activities, university decision making for procurement of laptops for emergency online learning during future pandemics.