

# Innovations in Pedagogical Practice and Curriculum Development in Higher Education

CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES



Edited by

JOSEPHINE DEGUARA, GLADSON CHIKWA  
EDWIN RAJAH & YANMIN ZHAO

# **Innovations in Pedagogical Practice and Curriculum Development in Higher Education**

The titles and synopsis of these chapters suggest that this publication makes for some exciting considerations towards improving teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Teaching and learning are key issues in any reputable HE institution and in a context where HE settings often compete to attract students to their diverse fields of research studies. Quality learning experiences are crucial for students pursuing their studies in the 21st century. Such experiences benefit from appealing, innovative teaching offered by seasoned and younger academic members of staff. Teaching must be informed by sound pedagogical approaches and methodologies which motivate the student body, consider and address their preferred modes of learning and effectively incorporate and maximise the benefits of digital technologies. In addition, teaching becomes more engaging and participatory when learners have been invited to co-construct the curriculum and when the teaching plans and overall curricula address students' learning habits and learning circumstances which can sometimes offer considerable challenges.

—***Professor Valerie Sollars, Pro-Rector for Strategic Planning & Sustainability, University of Malta***

In a wide ranging topical book aimed at those at the forefront of delivering education in the higher education sector, the book presents a collection of perspectives on pedagogy and curriculum development. The book discusses co-creating learning experiences with students as partners, developing educational applications, and reconfiguring teacher education in the wake of COVID-19. It's a practical guide for anyone looking to reshape their teaching approach or curricular design to address the needs of today's students.

—***Professor Nick Brook, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Research, The Manchester Metropolitan University***

In a time when higher education is undergoing a profound transformation, this book offers a timely and indispensable resource for educators, learning designers, and policymakers. Drawing on diverse backgrounds, the authors bring a wealth of expertise to the table, blending research, practical insights, and actionable strategies that address the pressing challenges faced by today's educators. Its comprehensive exploration of innovative teaching and learning approaches, grounded in global perspectives, empowers readers to shape the future of higher education. Whether you are an academic leader seeking to inspire change, an educator aiming to enhance your teaching practice, or a researcher exploring contemporary pedagogical methods, this book is an essential addition to your library.

—***Professor Sheau-Fen (Crystal) Yap, Professor of Marketing, Auckland University of Technology***

Innovations in Pedagogical Practice and Curriculum Development in Higher Education – this book is an essential read for anyone invested in the future of higher education. Whether you are a university administrator, instructor, instructional designer, or student, this book offers invaluable insights that can transform how we approach teaching and learning in higher education.

The authors provide a global perspective on the cutting-edge innovations shaping the higher education landscape through a comprehensive series of chapters. From integrating emerging technologies to designing inclusive, equitable, and sustainable curricula, this book equips readers with a broad range of knowledge and strategies to navigate the rapidly evolving higher education ecosystem.

What sets this work apart is the authors' unique blends of scholarly expertise and practical experience. Drawing on their extensive backgrounds in educational leadership, pedagogical research, and curriculum development, they offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing higher education institutions worldwide.

This book is vital for anyone seeking to future-proof higher education and empower the next generation of global citizens. By embracing the innovations highlighted in these pages, readers will be poised to lead the charge in redefining the student experience, fostering lifelong learning, and, ultimately, shaping a more equitable and sustainable future.

*—Dr James Ko,*  
**The Education University of Hong Kong**

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# **Innovations in Pedagogical Practice and Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Contemporary Global Perspectives**

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

Editorial matter and selection © 2025 Josephine Deguara, Gladson Chikwa, Edwin Rajah,  
and Yanmin Zhao.

Individual chapters © 2025 The authors.

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83549-507-0 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83549-506-3 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83549-508-7 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# Preface

The Higher Education (HE) landscape is ever-changing. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the use of online learning, while changes in learner demographics have required higher education institutions (HEIs) to embrace more inclusive learning and teaching practices. These on-going changes make it necessary for HEIs to proactively innovate to adapt to challenges facing them in contemporary times. Hence, innovation is imperative for HEIs to evolve and enhance teaching and learning approaches to better support the learners entering HE.

This book of readings is a collaborative effort of a community of practice (CoP) called International Learning and Teaching Special Interest Group (ITLSIG). This professional network consists of members from more than 15 countries bringing together more than 30 HEIs spread across different continents, including Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and North America. The ITLSIG activities are currently supported by Manchester Metropolitan University.

The idea for this book emerged during one of our regular ITLSIG member discussions in 2023. Members of the CoP expressed a desire to showcase and share their research ideas and perspectives to a wider audience. On-going discussions led to the concept of an edited book. We put together a book proposal to Emerald Publishers which was subsequently accepted. In our call for book chapters, the network members decided to cast our call for book chapters beyond our CoP. We received responses from 67 authors, resulting in 35 book chapters and 8 case study contributions. With such a strong response, Emerald Publishers suggested we had sufficient contributions for two volumes for a book on Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Our aim for this book publication was to provide an opportunity for contributors to share their ideas on teaching and learning to enhance creativity and innovation for HE practitioners. To attain this aim, the team of editors for the book project sought to capture diverse innovative practices in HE across different parts of the globe. Additionally, we strived to include contributions from both experienced and emerging authors, as well as getting contributions from multi-disciplinary perspectives and experiences. We have made every effort to ensure that the chapters are written in an accessible way and this book of readings benefits a range of HE practitioners including academics and those who work in third spaces such as educational developers, digital developers, and study skills experts.

Volume 1 on Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education contains 17 chapters split into two parts: the Part 1 (Chapters 1–6) reports on ‘Innovations in Pedagogical Practice in Higher Education’, while Part 2 (Chapters 7–17) reports on ‘Innovations in Curriculum Development in Higher Education’.

## **Part 1: Innovations in Pedagogical Practice in Higher Education**

In Chapter 1, Chikwa et al. discuss the need to rethink online teaching and learning approaches to enhance student engagement and foster a sense of belonging in online learning environments. Reflecting on their extensive experiences in HE, they offer practical insights into how to improve learning in online environments.

Chapter 2, authored by Mitchell, explores the impact of gamification through integrating a combination of simulation activities and diverse challenges into the student educational experience, to support student engagement, foster social interactions and promote the development of employability skills, particularly for law students. This chapter investigates the use of a game ‘The Legal Factor’ which combines serious learning with playful activities, offering insights into how gamification can transform the learning process.

In Chapter 3, Mu et al. report how the ubiquitous use of mobile devices is leveraged for facilitating the teaching of English to non-native English speakers. This chapter discusses the benefits and challenges, as well as providing guidelines and suggestions for incorporating mobile devices into teaching design and practice.

Chapter 4, by Rajah et al., investigates the adoption of authentic learning using a guest lecture approach in the marketing domain. This approach is shown to enhance student engagement and foster deeper learning, providing students with an applied and authentic learning experience context.

In Chapter 5, Spiteri Cornish examines the shift to online learning prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic sharing her experiences in teaching healthcare students. Through a reflective narrative, she highlights how diverse tools can be adapted for online platforms to support learning. This chapter encourages and demonstrates how educators can embrace available technologies to build engaging and supportive online learning environments.

Chapter 6, authored by Savage and Rupp, reports on a transdisciplinary approach to facilitate student awareness and engagement with sustainable development practices. The authors adopt a gaming intervention, called the ‘Fish Game’, as an innovative tool to help students understand the complexities involved in managing sustainability issues.

## **Part 2: Innovations in Curriculum Development in Higher Education**

In Chapter 7, Beckingham provides a reflective case study on a ‘Students as Partners’ initiative that explores the use of social media for learning and teaching,

and offers practical suggestions for adapting and implementing social media as a learning tool in different learning contexts.

Chapter 8, by Chatto and Jaffe, highlights the development of a digital interactive mobile application, ‘3D Build-a-Brain’ application, designed to improve the visualisation of complex neuroanatomy concepts for healthcare education learners. The application supports self-regulated learning and improves motivation of learners.

In Chapter 9, Milton et al. advocate for initial teacher education programmes to embrace technology by integrating online and hybrid learning into the curricula. The authors emphasise the importance of aligning pedagogy with the demands of a technology-based learning landscape.

Chapter 10, by Rajah and Wood, investigates the use of blogging to enhance student engagement and deepen learning in marketing courses in tertiary education. The study reports that blogging provides for a more enriching learning experience through both experiential and real-world application learning contexts.

In Chapter 11, Rajah and Zhu evaluate the effectiveness of web-based business simulations in bridging the gap between theory and practice in postgraduate business education. Their findings suggest that simulations support experiential learning, improving the development of both hard and soft skills development in participants.

Chapter 12, authored by Nelson et al., provides a reflective review of the impact of the pandemic lockdown on the benefits and challenges for remote education in HE. The chapter focusses on the unique needs of commuter students, offering insights and recommendations for fostering inclusivity and providing better support for this often-overlooked group of learners.

In Chapter 13, Brissenden highlights the importance of understanding musical tuning in the context of enculturation and decolonisation and its implications for the music curriculum. This chapter explores the interplay between traditional Western music education (enculturation) and the efforts to decolonise the curriculum.

Chapter 14, by Kauser et al., presents the design and development of a system called MaRILU® which catalyses consistent and equitable laboratory support for learners with disabilities. The study demonstrates that co-created support systems increase learners’ sense of value and belonging, contributing to a more inclusive learning experience.

In Chapter 15, Agha et al. examine practices in HEIs in the UAE to enhance students’ mental health and well-being. The chapter offers valuable insights into practical approaches for improving mental health and well-being in HEIs, with lessons applicable both within the UAE and beyond.

Chapter 16, authored by Keith, suggests that to meet the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, Higher Education Providers (HEPs) must address the increase in low levels of student wellbeing. The chapter advocates for a sustainable, inside-out approach to improve mental wellbeing of both students and staff in HEPs.

In Chapter 17, Puntha explores the concept of sustainability literacy, emphasising its importance as an often-overlooked issue in HE teaching. This contribution

aims to help HE practitioners new to Education for Sustainability (EfS) to build their expertise to integrate EfS into their teaching.

This edited book is a testament to the power of collaboration of ITLSIG members whose unwavering support made this project a reality. We are grateful to all the authors who worked really hard to meet the tight submission deadlines for the production of this book. We also want to extend our gratitude to all the book chapter reviewers within and beyond our network, who have contributed to enhancing the quality of the book chapters. Our gratitude also extends to the Emerald Team who have provided guidance in our journey towards completing this book project. Lastly, the four co-editors – Josephine Deguara, Gladson Chikwa, Edwin Rajah, and Yanmin Zhao – each brought their unique expertise and experience to this project, while collaborating across different time zones to bring this book to fruition.

To all the readers, we hope the chapters in this book provide valuable food for thought and serve as a catalyst for transformative practice within your different areas. This book is a worthwhile addition to extant literature on teaching and learning in HE.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following reviewers for their willingness to contribute, and for taking the time and effort necessary to review the chapters in this book. We sincerely appreciate all the valuable comments and suggestions. Their expertise and insights helped to improve the quality of this book.

Ajiri Ayokunle, *University of Leeds, Leeds, England, UK.*

Montserrat Nunez Chicharro, *Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real Castilla-La Mancha, Spain.*

Vanessa Cui, *Birmingham City University, Birmingham, England, UK.*

Samson Damilola Fabiyi, *University of Leeds, Leeds, England, UK.*

Fahimeh Farjami, *Istanbul Nişantaşı University, Istanbul, Turkey.*

Marie Therese Farrugia, *University of Malta, Msida, Malta.*

Josephine Gabi, *Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, England, UK.*

Shirley-Ann Gauci, *Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology, Paola, Malta.*

Petty Makoni, *University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe.*

Themesa Neckles, *University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England, UK.*

Heather McClean, *University College of London, London, England, UK.*

Olufemi Omisakin, *Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand.*

Sharan Singh, *Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand.*

Lin Sun, *School of Foreign Languages, Hezhou University, Guangxi, China.*

Tian Tian, *Communication University of Zhejiang, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China.*

Liqun Zheng, *Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China.*

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Part 1

# **Innovations in Pedagogical Practice in Higher Education**

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## Chapter 1

# Time to (Re-)Think Online Learning and Teaching in Higher Education?: Towards the Enhancement of a Sense of Belonging and Student Engagement and Participation in an Online Context

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### Abstract

Online learning and teaching continue to gain traction in the higher education landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for change in the way university educators across the globe approach learning and teaching activities. Anecdotally, higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide have been compelled to embrace technology and offer their students an online learning experience. Some important questions have arisen regarding the effectiveness of online learning and teaching. For instance, how can we foster the development of a sense of belonging in an online environment? How can we promote student engagement and participation in online contexts? This chapter combines reflections of four educators (the authors) and ideas from extant literature to provide practical strategies for developing a sense of belonging and enhancing participation in online contexts. Based on extant literature, the chapter discusses different principles derived from online design models including the community of inquiry, Gilly Salmon's five-stage model, and the conversational framework that

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**Innovations in Pedagogical Practice and Curriculum Development in Higher Education: Contemporary Global Perspectives, 3–16**

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doi:[10.1108/978-1-83549-506-320251001](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-506-320251001)

the authors consider to be critical for promoting student engagement and participation in online learning environments.

*Keywords:* Online learning and teaching; online pedagogy; sense of belonging; student engagement; student participation; online design models; online learning environment

## **Introduction**

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, the conventional approaches to learning and teaching are being questioned and reevaluated. This includes a shift away from traditional learning environments like classrooms and lecture theatres, as well as established teaching methods. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, accelerated the adoption of online learning, signalling a significant change in educational practices across the globe. Understandably, online learning provides an opportunity to expand the learning environment for the diverse student population entering higher education (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). The authors of this chapter are higher education educators who belong to the cross-institutional network called International Teaching and Learning Special Interest Group (visit: <https://itlsig.mmu.ac.uk>). The group acts as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and provides a platform for the sharing of good practice in teaching, learning, assessment, and pedagogic research. The four authors worked in different universities during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, two of the authors worked in two UK universities, and the other two authors worked in two countries in the Gulf region, in particular, Kuwait and Oman. They all have had practical experience of teaching and assessing students in an online context during the COVID-19 pandemic; hence, they intend to share their experiences in those different contexts and proffer some practical ideas related to the enhancement of the students' learning experience in an online milieu. It is anticipated that the ideas shared in this chapter can be harnessed by other educators to enhance online learning experience as well as support the development of teacher practice.

The chapter makes use of Driscoll's (2007) reflective model which is based on the three key questions: 'What?', 'So what?', and 'Now what?'. These questions provide a framework that facilitates a process of critical reflection which begins with a description of the experience ('what?'), an analysis of its significance ('So what?'), and culminates with a synthesis of learning and future implications ('Now what?'). In line with this, the authors intend to share their experiences of learning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic time, analyse their experiences in light of extant literature, and finally, reflect on how online learning and teaching can be enhanced during and beyond a time of crisis. Hofer et al. (2021) argue that the insights gained from the crisis are valuable and should be remembered, to serve as a guide for potential future emergencies. In addition, the lessons play a pivotal role in enhancing and refining online learning and teaching during normal times.

## **‘What?’: Reflections on Emergency Online Learning and Teaching**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an important catalyst for change in learning, teaching, and assessment in the HEIs across the globe. According to [Gurung and Stone \(2023, p. 1\)](#): ‘the Coronavirus catalysed seismic changes as, seemingly overnight, instruction went remote’. Reflecting on the rapid nature of the change, [Baume \(2021, n.p.\)](#) asserted that: ‘the great leap online induced by the COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest, most rapid and most global change that higher education has ever undertaken’. Arguably, the pandemic has been a powerful catalyst for change in the way learning and teaching are organised and delivered across the higher education sector. Although we had e-learning prior to the pandemic, the pandemic provided HEIs with a rare opportunity to introduce digital learning at scale over a short period of time ([Dhawan, 2020](#)). The new changes affected many students across the globe who had entered university anticipating having an on-campus experience and face-to-face learning. Online learning had been challenging in general and could be even more challenging if it is new to students who were expecting a face-to-face learning experience. The sudden transition from face-to-face to online learning and teaching caught many educators and students unprepared. [Murphy \(2020\)](#) rightly refers to this time as the period of emergency online learning and teaching. Studies conducted in different parts of the world revealed that a considerable majority of educators did not have any experience of teaching in an online environment ([Chikwa et al., 2021](#); [Hofer et al., 2021](#)).

Reflecting on the situation in the Gulf region, the two co-authors of this chapter who worked in that region commented that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the teachers never taught their lessons online. A considerable majority of staff and students never considered online teaching and learning as a legitimate approach to use in schools and universities. When the pandemic started, both teachers and students had limited or no experience of teaching or learning in an online environment. These HEIs used different platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, or MS Teams to facilitate the continuity of learning and teaching. Reflecting on the challenges of adapting to online learning, the two authors from the Gulf region indicated that the pandemic presented an awkward moment for both teachers and students operating in that online environment. For instance, the students chose not to turn on their cameras to show their faces during lessons and during the examinations. This was due to several reasons including cultural factors, as well as lack of appropriate study spaces at home. It was also observed that some of the students were not even attending the scheduled online sessions, choosing to log into the session but with no proof that they were physically in attendance behind the screens. With the cameras turned off, it was difficult for the teachers to build any meaningful interactions and relationship with the students online. Anecdotal evidence shows that there was a lack of a sense of belonging; students did not feel that they were learning at university since they could not be on campus and were unable to see their peers and their teachers in person. They did not take the online education seriously. Some of them literally expressed to

their teachers that they felt like they were on vacation by not having to attend the classes in person on campus. After the COVID-19 pandemic most of the learning and teaching activities went back to face-to-face sessions in classrooms in Oman and in Kuwait.

On the other hand, similar experiences were observed in the UK universities. The transition to online learning and teaching involved the use of different technologies such as virtual learning environments as well as other videoconferencing software such as Zoom and MS Teams, among others. The use of these technologies provided an opportunity for the universities across the country to continue to deliver teaching despite the massive disruption caused by the pandemic. Academics had to design a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities which meant that students had opportunities to work online with their peers and educators as well as opportunities to work independently in an online environment. Like the situation in Kuwait and Oman, a considerable majority of staff and students did not have an online teaching and learning experience prior to the pandemic. It was not easy for the academic staff to learn how to use the new technologies and to deploy the online learning and teaching pedagogy overnight. This was an additional layer of challenges to online learning. Similarly to the situation in the two Gulf countries, after the pandemic most of the learning and teaching activities went back to face-to-face teaching in the UK. However, in the UK, there was a lot of talks about the need to hold on to the lessons learnt during the pandemic. Some colleagues considered continuing with some aspects of online teaching they found useful, choosing to adopt a hybrid approach in the teaching of their subjects. This means maintaining some online sessions and mixing these with some face-to-face activities. Two main questions emerged from the authors' reflections:

1. How can students be supported to develop a sense of belonging when learning in an online environment?
2. How can student engagement and participation be enhanced in an online environment?

Our definition of sense of belonging is taken from [Goodenow \(1993, p. 25\)](#) who describes a sense of belonging as comprising feelings of:

[B]eing accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (educators and peers) in the academic classroom [or in any learning environment] and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual.

From the above definition, it can be seen that it is important for every student to feel accepted, needed, and valued in any learning environment. Every student has feelings of being connected to their peers, class, course or the university, or

in the words of [Matheson and Sutcliffe \(2017\)](#), to all of these. Before turning to address these two questions, the following section focuses on the ‘So what?’ question, that is, a discussion of what is currently known about the pedagogy of online learning and teaching in extant literature.

## **‘So What?’: Online Learning and Teaching Pedagogy**

[Urdan and Weggen \(2000\)](#) provide a comprehensive definition of online learning stating that this encompasses a variety of terms, including web-based training, e-learning, distributed learning, Internet-based learning, web-based teaching, cyber learning, virtual learning, and net-based learning. These terms all relate to the educational methods that deploy the internet to teach and facilitate learning remotely. Arguably, online learning is not a new phenomenon; it existed for several decades before the COVID-19 pandemic; however, as observed earlier, there was a dramatic increase in its use during the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is an appetite to further develop its use beyond the pandemic. This mode of learning has become increasingly prevalent, offering flexibility and accessibility to learners worldwide.

Reflecting on the transition to online teaching in higher education, [Lorenzetti \(2004\)](#) suggests that educators transitioning to online teaching platforms need a period of adjustment to fully grasp the distinct roles and responsibilities associated with this mode of learning and teaching. During the pandemic, most of the students were unfamiliar with online learning; hence, they had to learn how to engage with learning materials, their educators, and peers in that new space. To deliver good quality lectures, tutorials and seminars, and other learning activities, technology had to be provided and academics had to master how to use the available tools effectively. [Hofer et al. \(2021\)](#) highlight that the effectiveness of educators in leveraging digital technology to design and provide meaningful learning experiences for students is influenced by a variety of factors, such as their understanding, proficiency, and disposition towards digital tools and platforms. Similarly, students had to learn and understand how to make use of the available tools to benefit their learning.

The authors’ individual experiences helped them to appreciate that the dynamics of online learning pedagogy are different from traditional pedagogy. For instance, the nuanced dynamics of formal and informal exchanges that occur naturally in in-person settings are challenging to replicate in virtual spaces. While digital platforms offer various tools to facilitate communication, the spontaneous and intricate aspects of physical interactions often do not translate seamlessly to online modalities. Yet, as [Strayhorn \(2012\)](#) observes, such interactions are vital for the development of relationships between the learners and their educators, as well as between the learners and their peers. In the online setting, it is essential for educators to guide students in cultivating skills that enable them to effectively communicate and collaborate with educators, peers, and to interact meaningfully with the learning materials. This orientation is crucial for fostering an interactive and engaging learning environment.

Garrison et al. (2000) emphasise the critical role of cultivating online communities, stating its significant influence on enhancing the quality of student learning. Such community building efforts can boost student participation and foster motivation within online learning environments. This underscores the value of interactive and supportive online spaces in contributing to the educational experience. Garrison et al. (2000) developed the community of inquiry model which is a theoretical framework that focuses on facilitating meaningful learning experiences through three presences: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Fiock, 2020). Cognitive presence refers to the learners' ability to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse. This means that students should be given opportunities to engage with regular assessment and feedback and should be provided with multiple representations of the knowledge they should learn including opportunities to engage with activities that help them to develop the desired skills, among others. Social presence refers to the ability to perceive others in an online environment as 'real' and the projection of oneself as a real person. This revolves around open communication, affective expression, and group cohesion. Related literature advocates that within online environments, interaction between learners is of great importance to student success (Richardson et al., 2017). Educators can communicate with students through announcements, emails, videos, and should offer optional office hours for students to ensure that students have the opportunity to clarify any questions they might have. Last but not least, teaching presence refers to the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the realisation of meaningful learning. This involves the design and organisation of the course and learning activities, facilitation of the course and learning activities, and synchronous learning sessions. Educators should act as facilitators of students' learning, ensuring that students are provided with timely and constructive feedback. It is also important to ensure that students are provided with enough guidance in all learning activities. Akyol and Garrison (2008) assert that there is a relationship between the three presences and students' perceived learning, satisfaction with the course, satisfaction with the educator, actual learning, and sense of belonging. According to Garrison et al.'s (2000) community of inquiry model, effective learning occurs at the intersection of social, teaching, and cognitive presence. Arguably, for a successful transition from traditional to active online pedagogy, educators should change their approach to teaching used in face-to-face settings and embrace new skills to provide effective support to learners online as discussed above.

When teaching and supporting learning is an online space, it is important to be able to design learning materials and to prepare learning activities for both synchronous and asynchronous sessions. The authors found online design models such as Gilly Salmon's (2013) five-stage model and Diana Laurillard's (1993) conversational framework useful when designing and delivering online learning. Gilly Salmon's five-stage model outlines a structured process that learners and educators can follow to ensure a successful online learning experience. The model consists of five stages: