



Relationship between students and learning materials during the emergency response to COVID-19

The Students' Access to and Use of Learning Materials (SAULM) survey

Webinar 4: Flexible and Blended Teaching and Learning Practices in PSET

T: +27 51 401 9306 | E: StrydomJF@ufs.ac.za | www.ufs.ac.za/ctl

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Prof. Francois Strydom

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Methodology and sample

The SAULM survey was developed with the following **research questions** in mind:

- To what extent are students able to access and use different forms of learning materials?
- In what ways, if any, did students' access and use of learning materials differ before and after the national lockdown?

- Particular focus on **NSFAS** students
- Consultation with sector - DHET, CHE, USAf, and representatives from 10 institutions that form part of the SASSE network during an online workshop on 30 April 2020

- **24** participating institutions; **48,981** respondents (5% of sector; 69% NSFAS students – 6% of sector); **3,672** pages of qualitative data

- Descriptive analysis using SPSS; qualitative data – thematic inductive and deductive, complemented by text mining algorithms (frequencies and patterns)



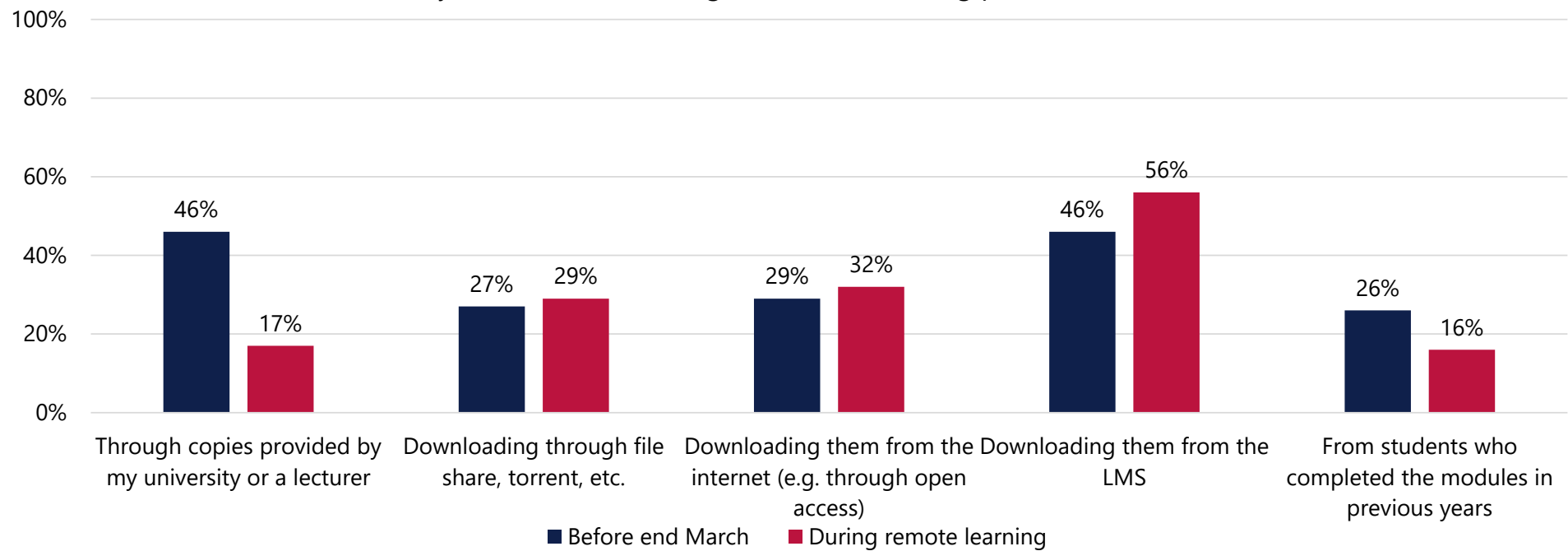


Learning materials



Learning materials

How did you access the learning materials (excluding prescribed textbooks)?



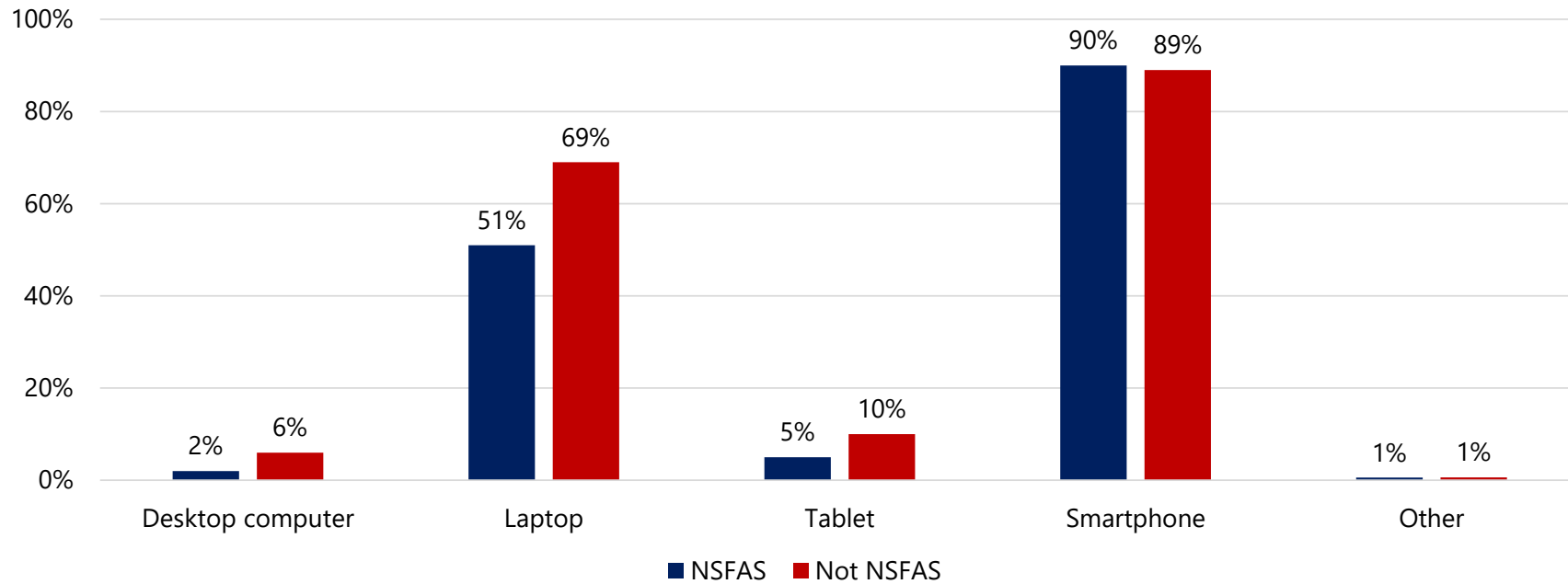


**Access to devices, data
and connectivity**



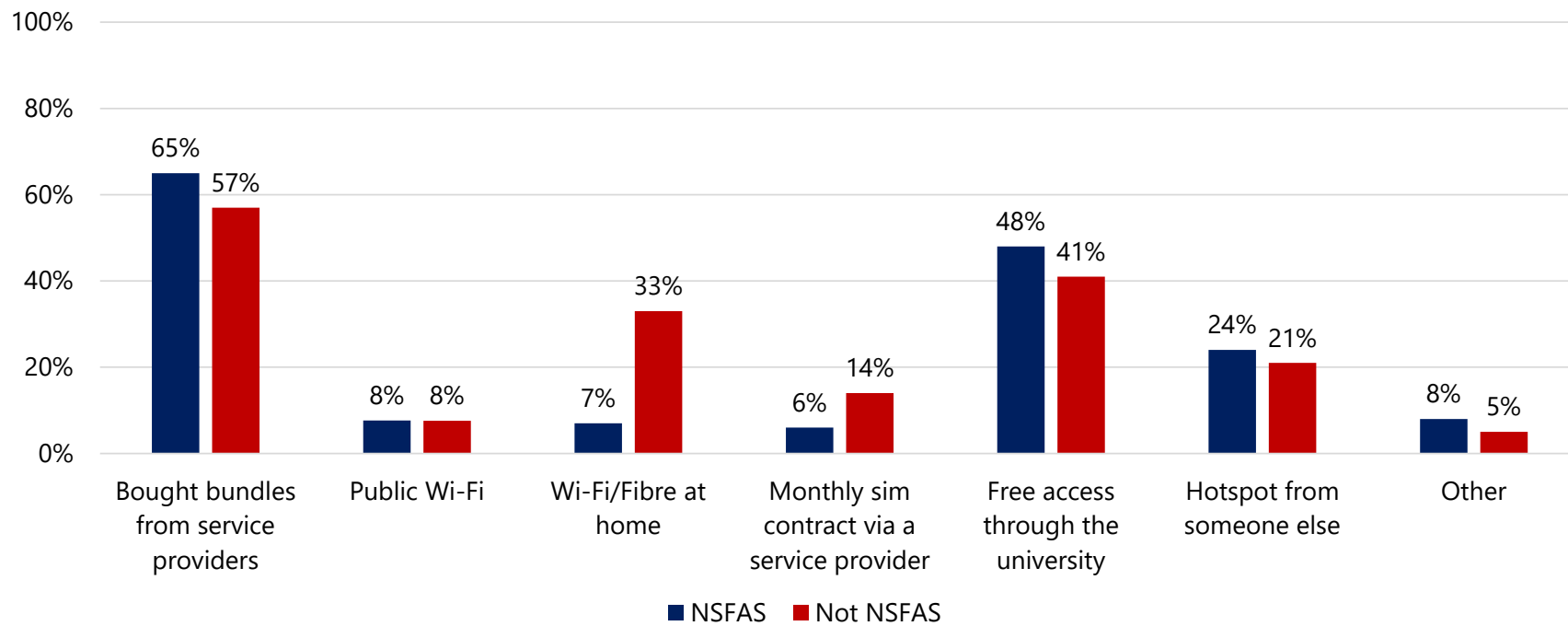
Access to devices, data and connectivity

Please indicate which devices you own and use to engage with your studies when you are off-campus.



Engagement with educational technology

How did you access the data you used for the online activities?

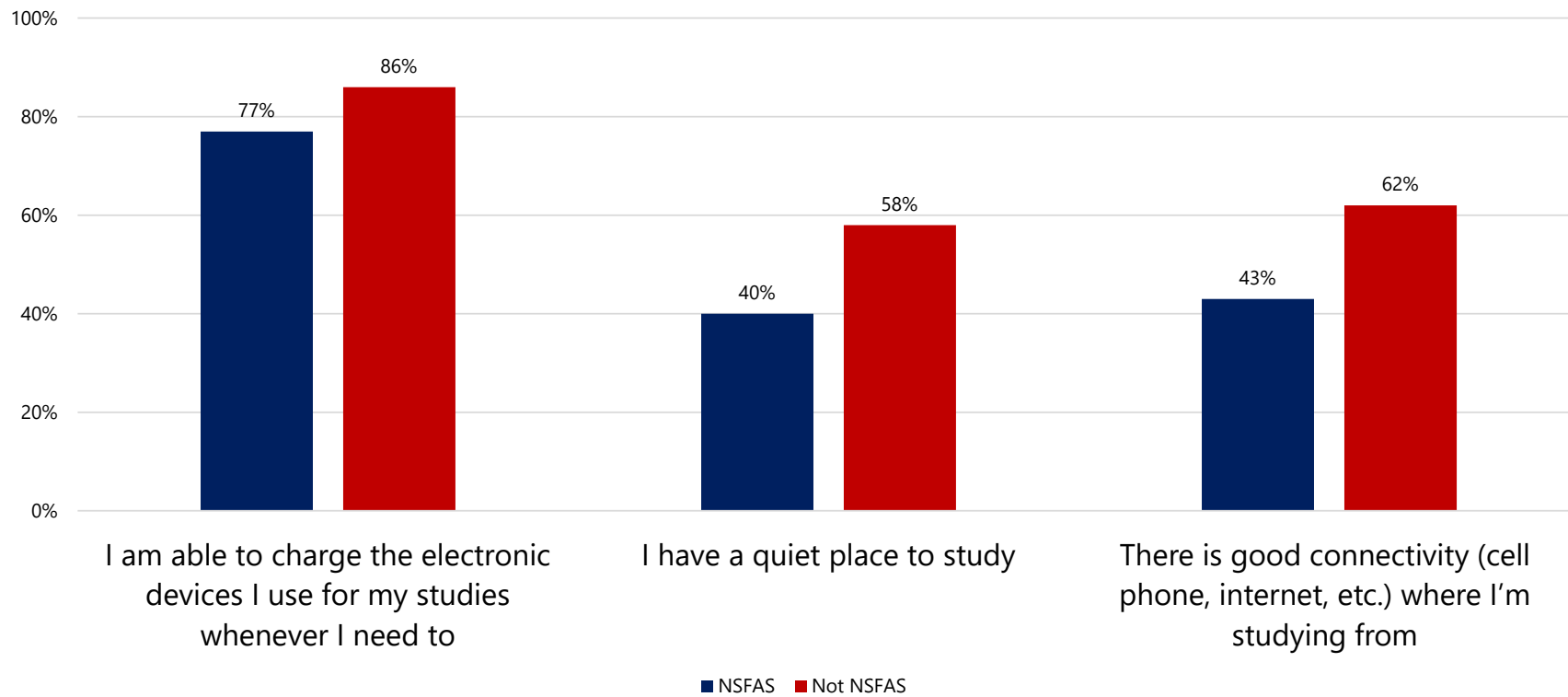




Engagement with educational technology

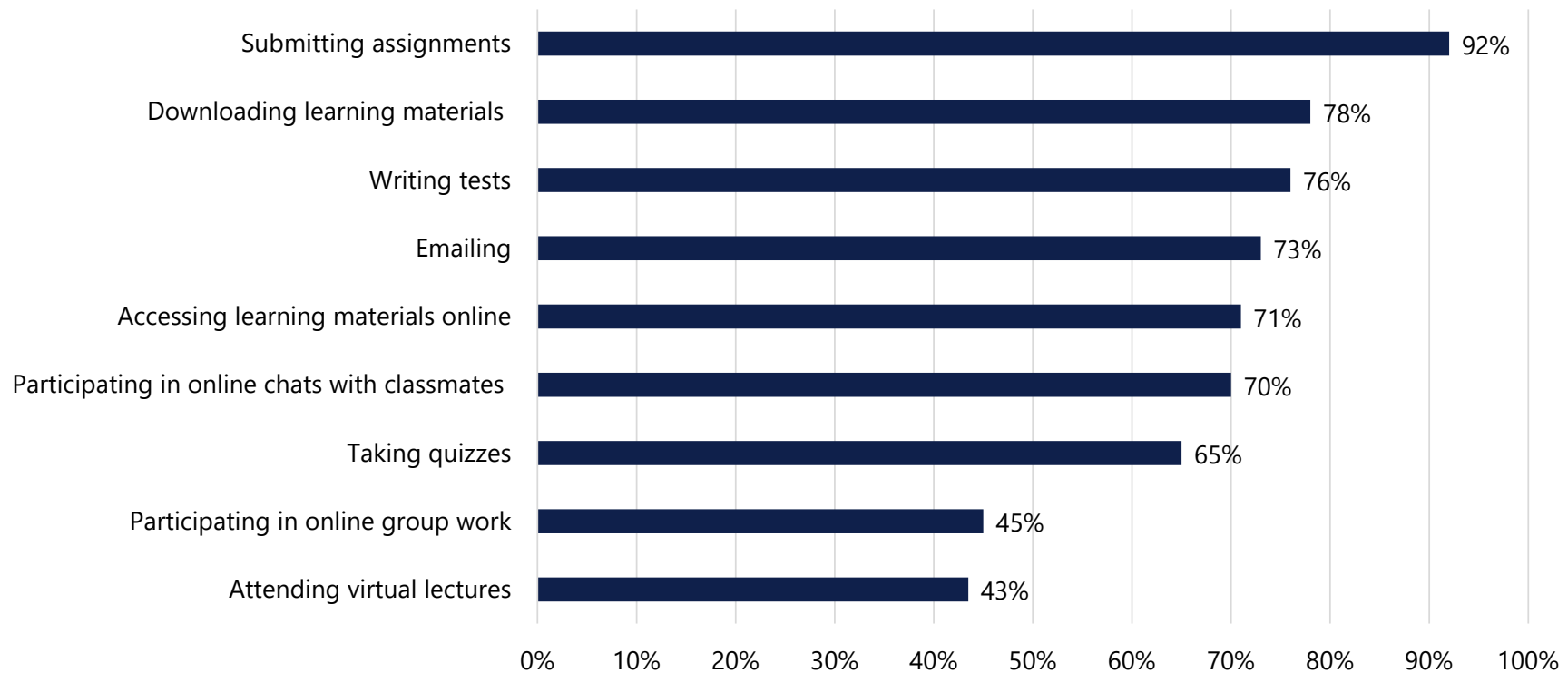


Engagement with educational technology



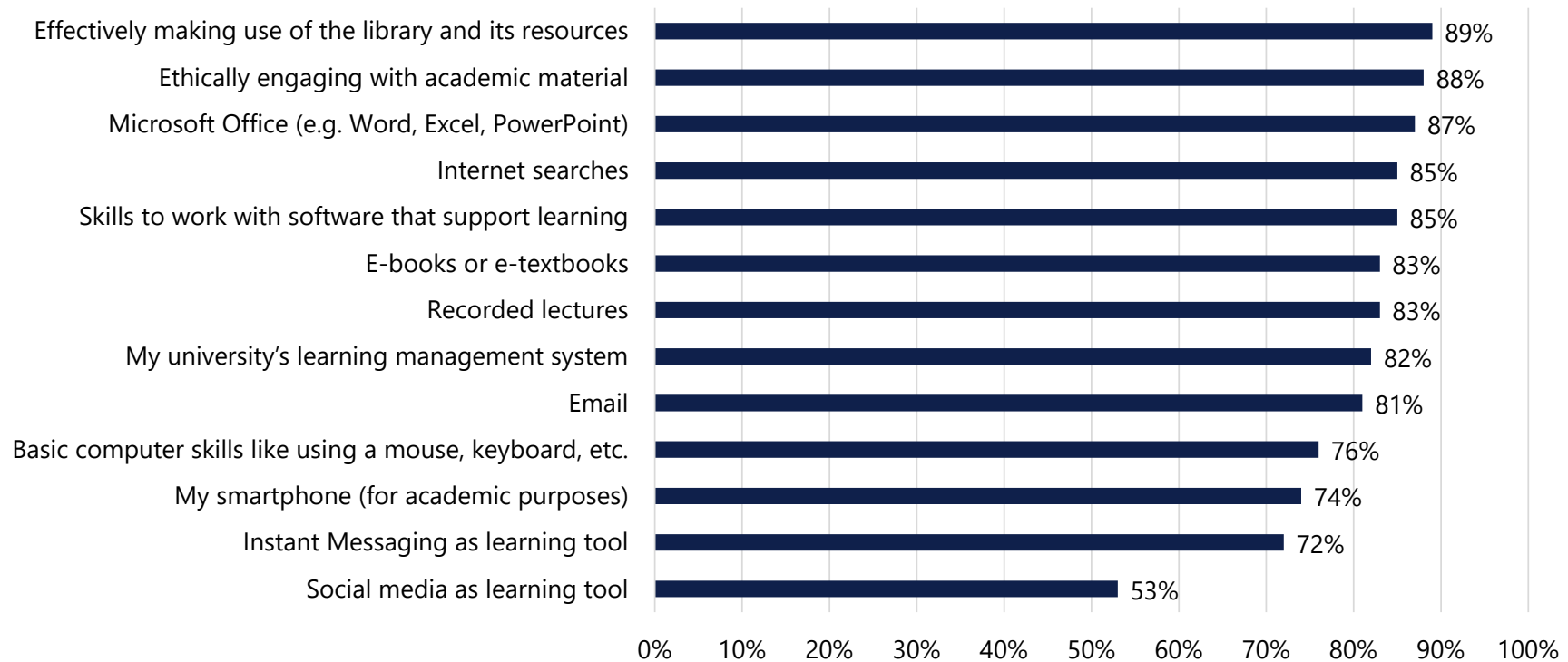
Engagement with educational technology

During the first semester of 2020, which online activities have you engaged in?



Engagement with educational technology

I would be a more successful student if I were better trained in:





**Students' experiences:
main benefits and
challenges of learning
with technology**



Main **benefits** of learning with technology

1. Motivation and adaptation
2. Connectivity, data and devices
3. Literacy modules
4. Developing skills, competencies and knowledge
5. Better understanding of content
6. Better academic performance
7. Assessments and feedback
8. Engagement with lecturers and peers
9. Appreciating lecturers and institutional support
10. Convenience
11. Becoming independent/ self-directed learners

Main **benefits** of learning with technology

*There is a lot **more access to learning materials** and it is **extremely beneficial to have recorded lectures** which I can refer back to and re-watch if something is unclear.*

*I feel it's easier as **I usually have to take 4 busses to get to university and back home.** Sometimes I had to do that to attend just one lecture where as the info or the lecture could have been live streamed and I could have actively taken part from home.*

Main challenges of learning with technology

1. Network
2. Data
3. Devices
4. Skills and competencies
5. Other technical difficulties
6. Environment
7. Learning materials
8. Distractions
9. First year students
10. Practical work
11. Lecturers and lectures and communication
12. Clarity, assessment and feedback
13. Mental health
14. Universal access
15. Intersections

Main **challenges** of learning with technology

*It's very **challenging and frustrating** at times **when you don't know how to use technology.***

***Sometimes family does not understand** that we have to study, they call us while in a middle of a test to go and fetch water and they wanted the money we use for bundles for us to buy food or pay something.*



Implications for the sector



1. Basic learning infrastructure is critical

- Ensuring that **all staff and students** have access to basic learning infrastructure, which includes **appropriate devices, data** and **connectivity**
- A more **flexible learning environment** that incorporates more technology in teaching and learning is expected to **become the norm**.
- For this to be successful, **students**, and particularly students from **lower socioeconomic circumstances**, need to be supported to access basic learning infrastructure. This is a crucial first step to address the **digital divide**.



2. Digital skills development needs to be prioritised at institutional and national level

- If a wider range of learning materials should become the norm, students need to be taught how to conduct **effective searches**, how to differentiate between **academic and non-academic knowledge**, and how to **ethically engage** with academic content – as aligned with principles of **Connectivism** (learning theory for the digital age focusing on the interplay between people, information, and platforms).
- **All institutions** should include **digital skills development**, intended to develop **information and media literacy** linked to academic literacy and **graduate attributes** to develop citizens for a 21st century world.
- In addition to students, **academic staff** need to be trained in **incorporating educational technology** into their pedagogical approaches. It is important to ask: **How has 2020/21 changed your assumptions of how students learn?**
- At the very least, institutions would need to invest in **learning designers** to assist in weaving in and optimising technology in disciplines.



3. Flexible content delivery platform(s)

- Developing or investing in **flexible content delivery platform(s)** that would allow more **affordable use of textbooks, institutionally developed materials**, as well as Open Education Resources (**OERs**) across a range of devices.
- The flexible platform must be built on **universal design principles** to enable universal access especially for students with disabilities.
- A flexible platform needs to allow **integration with various learning management systems** (LMS).
- This platform will create **more equitable access** to learning materials for NSFAS as well as “missing middle” students.
- By integrating these resources in a flexible platform system, students will be able **learn in different ways, at different times, from different sources and in different spaces**.
- Institutions should consider a **collective bargaining approach** or **shared services solution** that could be collaboratively led by USAf, the DHET as well as the CHE to create more cost effective access to learning materials.



4. Enhancing financial aid

- NSFAS students are able to buy devices and data more than students that do not have this support. **Existing support needs to continue**, and innovative **solutions for the “missing middle”** are vital to ensuring that all students can participate in a new learning and teaching environment.
- Alignment of **NSFAS policy that provides more guidance on how the learning materials allowance is structured** to include a laptop, an annual data bundle, and access to flexible learning materials platform.
- By **providing greater guidance**, the DHET will alleviate the **extremely difficult choices** students are forced to make **between the “tools” they need to succeed** and meeting the **socio-economic challenges** created by poverty.
- It is also important to mention that the **effectiveness and efficiency measures instituted at NSFAS should be strengthened**. Student responses show that delays in NSFAS payment had a negative impact on their ability to participate in learning.



5. Using the crises to reimagine learning and teaching

- **Students and institutions have learned valuable lessons** of the benefits a more technology infused learning and teaching environment can bring.
- Embracing technology offers and opportunity for **academics to redefine their role as teachers**, for **institutions to be more responsive** and for **students to become self-reliant and independent learners**.
- Some of the **questions** raised by students' responses are: Should a new teaching and learning environment not **raise the bar** in terms of challenging students to stretch themselves and realise their potential with the appropriate support? How has the pandemic enriched our **understanding of our students' contexts**? How has it **confronted our assumptions** of what students can and cannot do?



6. Reconceptualisation of subsidy assumptions and quality assurance

- The implications for the current **definition of contact, distance and online education** will need to be reconsidered in a “new normal.”
- New **quality assurance approaches** for the variety of **flexible learning approaches** that are going to remain during and after the pandemic will need to be developed.
- Academic staff play a central role in creating enriching teaching and learning environments. Therefore, it is important to **invest in research on how teaching and learning could or should be reconceptualised from the experiences of academics during remote learning** to make sure that this crisis is not wasted but used to improve the quality and efficiency of higher education institutions.





Thank you

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