

The Changing Trends in Higher Education: Lecturertainers' Pedagogy and Personality Blending

Sky L. Mkuti¹ and Wiza Munyeka²

¹The Independent Institute of Education (Emeris, Faculty of Humanities), South Africa

²Durban University of Technology (DUT), South Africa

smkuti@yahoo.com

wizam@dut.ac.za

Abstract: In the era of the 'New Normal,' marked by rapid digital transformation and evolving student expectations, traditional approaches to teaching face unprecedented challenges. To avoid being redundant, Teaching and Learning (T&L) teams are tasked to upskill their T&L roles in the classrooms and practice in the institutions of Higher Learning. To better serve the needs of the millennials and to advance academic excellence, lecturers and the education system must adapt to new and innovative approaches to T&L. Only then can Higher Education systems enable a *Lecturertainer* to supplement the existing traditional learning interventions. A *lecturertainer* is a new concept which compliments the contemporary T&L approaches in contemporary Higher Education. Whilst these must respond effectively to the hyper-transformative and highly-personalised solutions to match the evolving digital academic environment, this new concept enables lecturers to proactively shape students' learning experiences. This paper addresses the changing trends and trajectories in Higher Education which influence Lecturer's pedagogy and personality blending in the post-COVID-19 era. A *lecturertainer's* goal is to ensure adaptability to the digitalization in the classroom environment by utilising multimedia tools and enhance interactive pedagogy to captivate students, bridge digital divides, and foster academic excellence in both virtual and hybrid settings. This study's theoretical background conceptualises the term *lecturertainer* drawing on empirical studies and practical examples to uncover how lecturertainers navigate the demands of digital fluency, student engagement, and curriculum relevance in an increasingly diverse academic environment. The proposed *lecturertainer* model suggests that university educators must tap into *lecturertaining* transformational practices to enhance learning outcomes and enrich educational experiences. Thus, redefining pedagogical excellence in contemporary higher education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digitalisation, Higher Education, *Lecturertainer*, Teaching and Learning.

1. Introduction

The changing roles and identities of lecturers are heavily shaped by the higher education market. To ensure teaching remains interesting for students, lecturers have signaled the importance of having fun, especially for students but also for staff. It is, of course, to the credit of tutors that they design and deliver lessons that are enjoyable for their students. Although this study also questions the extent to which lecturers now consider entertainment to be a part of their teaching role. For educators, it is usually self-satisfying to observe student enjoyment in their teaching (Wong & Chiu, 2019). In exploring the question, "What is a lecturer?" Blair (2019) suggests that simply listing tasks offers only a superficial understanding of the role. While it's easy to assume the researchers fully grasp what it means to be a lecturer, a deeper inquiry reveals that this role is shaped by personal journeys and diverse perspectives within Higher Education. The complex and evolving nature of academia means that being a lecturer is not a fixed state; rather, it is an ongoing process of 'becoming' an actor of academic excellence in any education setting. This process is influenced by individual understanding and the expectations of others. Instead of searching for a single, universal definition, we should first take time to reflect on and explore our own interpretations of what it truly means to be a lecturer.

Education in the 21st century requires that its educators become adaptable to the new technological era where T&L skills are substantially diversified from past centuries. In a technologically-driven era, lecturers are expected to be vested with digital skills to better engage with digitally-bound students, making it imperative to enhance classroom creativity to better advance students' competencies and academic success (Söylemez, 2023).

With the closure of educational institutions worldwide, during COVID-19, a rapid shift to emergency remote education (ERE) occurred (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond 2020). Consequently, this periodic shift was dubbed the "great online learning experiment" (Zimmerman, 2020). This experiential period is still helping us understand what works and what does not. Though ERE and distance education may seem similar, they differ fundamentally. Distance education is a planned, optional approach rooted in theory, while ERE is an unplanned response to a crisis (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). While ERE and distance education are critical in maintaining learning continuity, they should not be misinterpreted to avoid widespread educational missteps, often by attempting to simply replicate face-to-face learning online. Hence, adaptability to online-specific methods is critical in mitigating a "copy-paste" approach, which has proven ineffective.

The rapid shift has also triggered “digital burnout” and fatigue, emerging as widespread issues in the post-COVID world, augmented by desensitisation coupled with physical stress and mental exhaustion (Degges-White, 2020; Nadler, 2020; Erten & Özdemir, 2020). In most cases, burnout affects both teachers and learners due to constant screen time, hyper-focus, and the lack of natural interaction. Preventing digital fatigue requires a strategic implementation of best practices and mindful approaches tailored to online sessions. However, with the normalisation of the post-COVID education, classrooms had to keep the tech-momentum by bringing technology into the T&L environment. The evolving nature of education in a fast-paced world suggests that “there is no running away from the use of technology in higher education” (Essop, 2021, p.33). Essentially, whilst incorporating technology in the teaching processes, lecturers have to continually upscale their teaching skills to retain relevance. Thus, being lectures with ‘entertaining’ skills – the new age *lecturetainers* who can adapt, communicate, learn new skills, are visionary leaders, collaborate, and take risks sensibly (Söylemez, 2023). This qualitative study employs a content analysis to explore *lecturetainers* role in Higher Education. It starts by conceptualizing the evolution of the ‘new normal’ in Higher Education. Thereafter, it discusses the rise of *lecturetainers* to uncover how they navigate the demands of digital fluency, student engagement, and curriculum relevance in an increasingly diverse academic environment.

2. The ‘New Normal’ in Higher Education

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a critical re-evaluation of educational assumptions, particularly within higher education, as outlined by Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia, and Koole (2021). Amid the widespread challenges, especially with emergency remote teaching (ERT), educators across levels reassessed their roles, approaches to supporting student learning, and the conceptualisation of students as self-directed learners, active citizens, and autonomous social agents (Rapanta et al., 2021). Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic has been more than a crisis; it has prompted a global shift in how we view the world and our everyday lives. The idea of “normal” has become fluid, evolving into terms like “new normal” and “next normal.” These variations highlight that what may be normal for one person can be new or future-facing for another, especially in areas like education, which is undergoing significant transformation in teaching and learning. This unprecedented period urges us to reflect on what was, what is, and what lies ahead.

3. The Rise of the *Lecturetainer*: Adapting to a New Pedagogical Persona

In this section, we introduce the term *Lecturetainer* which describes an adaptable educator who combines lecturing with entertainment to engage students through technology in a dynamic and interactive learning experience. It draws from the idea of “edutainment” which refers to a student-centred approach in a tech-bound learning environment where teaching and learning processes rely on Web 2.0 tools. The use of tech-tools such as mind mapping, infographics, cartoon creation and interactive video development, pins, YouTube videos etc. have become irreplaceable in T&L practices (Zorica, 2014). Apart from enhancing students’ academic experiences and increasing interest as well as active classroom interaction, the lecturer needs to keep the students ‘entertained’ by capturing their attention. Since the concept of a *lecturer*, lacks a universal definition, its definition can be blurred by the roles involved in academic practice. For the purpose of this chapter, a *lecturer* is an evolving term exhibited in the role that one plays during an instructional knowledge delivery. As such, through their “own understanding of the world” lecturers impart knowledge during interactions meant to satisfy others’ expectations (Blair, 2019:42). The *lecturetainer*, therefore, adopts entertainment skillfully to impart knowledge effectively (Zasrianita, Susanto & Revola, 2023). Thus, acting, speaking, or promoting interesting features or content about the lesson in a manner in which *Lecturetainers* comprehend the play role activities to ensure that student’s academic expectations are met.

The *lecturetainer* approach which refers to a blended T&L approach incorporates diverse modes of learning instruction. That is, a combination of face-to-face classroom teaching, online learning and the adoption of other digital technologies, which to an extent has become a major feature in the new normal amongst most South African HEIs (Mukhari & Sanders, 2025). This approach emphasises creativity, use of digital tools, and flexible teaching strategies to enhance engagement, not only in virtual settings but also in the classrooms. This lecturing style helps maintain student interest and enhance class participation. It makes learning both informative and enjoyable. This paper proposes the term ‘*Lecturetainer*’ and figure 1 illustrates this concept.

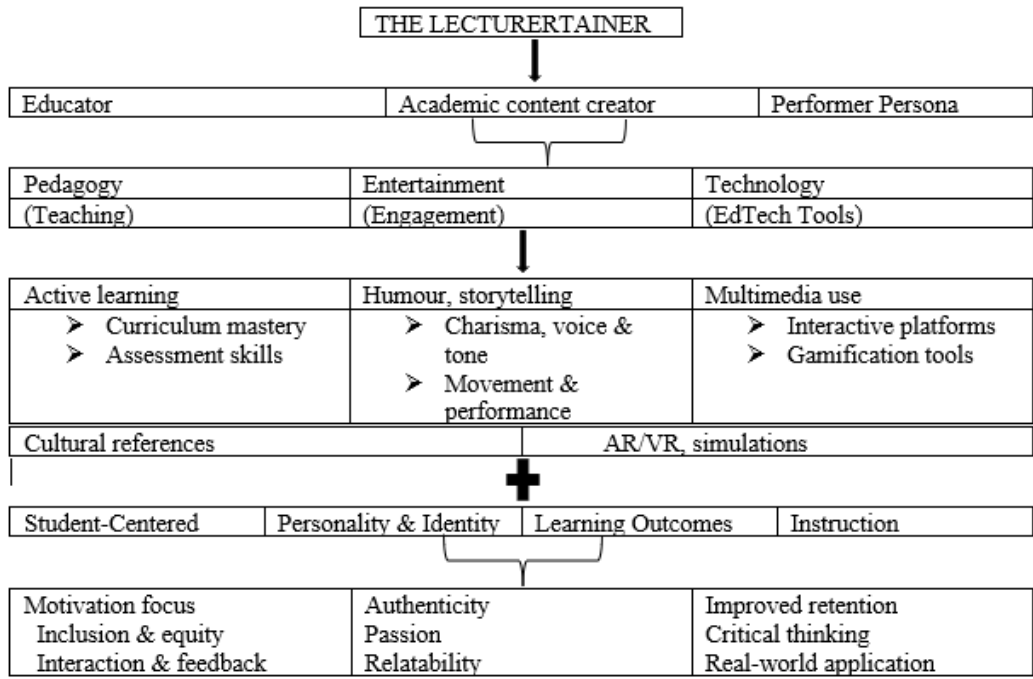


Figure 1: Proposed Lecturertainer model

The proposed *Lecturertainer* is a hybrid educational model that merges the roles of a lecturer and an entertainer to create a dynamic, engaging, and effective learning environment. At its core, the *Lecturertainer* maintains strong pedagogical foundations, ensuring academic rigor and structured content delivery. However, unlike traditional lectures, this approach incorporates elements of entertainment employing technological tools that captivate students' attention and enhance active participation. Modern technology supports this model by enabling the use of multimedia, gamification, and interactive platforms that deepen understanding. A student-centered philosophy lies at the heart of the *Lecturertainer's* practice, focusing on inclusivity, emotional connection, and fostering critical and creative thinking. Ultimately, this approach leads to improved student motivation, knowledge retention, and overall academic success, while making education an enjoyable experience. Important concepts in this proposed model are highlighted by Sonmark, Révai, Gottschalk, Deligiannidi and Burns (2017) who mention that pedagogical knowledge was broken down into the domains of assessment, instructional processes and learning processes. However, with the rise of technology, the methods of teaching, learning experiences, and educational outcomes are continuously transforming students' competencies in addressing societal challenges (Li and Zhang, 2025).

3.1 Student Engagement and Academic Rigour

The role of a *Lecturertainer* encompasses far more than just imparting curricula outcomes to their students; they need to equip students with the necessary tools to experience social and academic success both inside the classroom and beyond it. According to Franklin and Harrington (2019), this responsibility requires a shift from traditional teaching practices to methods that foster active engagement and critical reflection. Teachers need to empower students with the means to critically analyse the world around them to develop into critical, independent thinkers capable of navigating complex societal challenges. However, with the infinite volume of information available in our rapidly changing digital landscape. This means that lecturers need to constantly reinvent themselves whilst maintaining academic rigour (Rudman, 2021). It is not enough to ensure students' proficiency in utilising tech-tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and ChatGPT without promoting students' higher levels of thinking to avoid dependency to such tools. Given that education is highly driven by digital and information-saturated platforms, it is critical for both lecturers and students to continuously adapt to the challenges that come with technological innovation, specifically the ethical use of AI tools (Mulaudzi & Hamilton, 2025).

Just as teachers need to take responsibility for the various methods of teaching and learning in the classroom, students need to adhere not only to the institutional policies but also to the academic integrity by taking ownership of their academic journey whilst the lecturers guide and support their academic success.

4. Technology and Its Impact on Pedagogy

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has significantly influenced the landscape of higher education, offering tools that enhance learning efficiency and academic performance (Cooper, 2023; Goralski & Tan, 2020; Ouyang, Zheng & Jiao 2022). As AI becomes increasingly integrated into educational practices, it has the potential to empower students by expanding their capabilities and streamlining academic tasks. However, this technological shift is not without its drawbacks. Chen, Hu, and Wei (2025) observe that the growing reliance on AI in academic settings has also contributed to heightened levels of anxiety and stress among university students, raising concerns about its psychological impact. Thus, while AI offers considerable benefits in promoting educational advancement, it also necessitates critical reflection on its effects on student's over-reliance side effects. Panakaje *et al.* (2024) highlight that numerous models and theories have been developed to explain technology integration among teachers. Building upon this foundation, their study advances discourse by examining how such integration contributes to the enhancement of teaching practices—particularly in the areas of teacher learning, pedagogical strategies, instructional performance, and student engagement. A central challenge identified is the need to adopt innovative teaching methods that align with the increasingly tech-savvy nature of students. This underscores the imperative for educators to not only adopt but also effectively integrate technology into their pedagogical approaches to remain relevant and impactful in contemporary educational settings.

AI undoubtedly enhances educational quality, making education more personalized and efficient (Jian, 2023). However, some negative impacts have also garnered scholarly attention. Chief among them the rise in generative-AI hallucinations, which mislead information and compromise academic integrity causing ethical concerns (Zhai, Wibowo and Li, 2024). Additionally, AI dependency has proven to diminish students' critical cognitive capabilities arising from persistent reliance on generative-AI systems. For instance, Ivanov (2023) identified some dark sides of AI, in higher education, citing issues such as algorithmic bias, behaviour manipulation, excessive surveillance, over-reliance, and privacy breaches. More importantly, the technological pressure and psychological anxiety induced by AI can have profound effects on students while also exerting pressure on academic institutions and lecturers (Hopcan, Türkmen & Polat, 2024; Kwak, Ahn & Seo, 2022; Corbin, *et al.*, 2025).

4.1 The Gamification/use of Digital Tools in Learning

Gamification refers to the application of game design principles in non-game contexts, has emerged as a transformative strategy in higher education. It integrates academic web-based games to enhance class participation whilst actively engaging and motivating students to benefit from the module's learning outcomes. Since gamification provides “real-time feedback, leaderboards and score management,” lecturers can assess students' comprehension when using web-based games such as Kahoot and Quizzes (Shumba, 2024). Gamification has been widely used to design better educational systems aiming to increase students' concentration, motivation, engagement, flow experience, and others positive experiences Mushtaq, Nazeer, Fayaz & Gulzar, 2025). Chief amongst these experiences is the cultivation of a learning environment that is essentially inclusive and positive. Furthermore, the implementation of novel gamification tactics provides an opportunity to not only create personalized educational programs that encourage students' enthusiasm in the classroom but also improve academic excellence seen in the students' progressive results.

4.2 The Digital Divide

The COVID-19 worldwide pandemic affected extensively educational institutions that relied on traditional face-to-face teaching strategies. It is, however, worth noting that, despite the remnant COVID-19 challenges, other structural challenges persist in the context of South African HEIs. To the most part, South African higher education institutions are still battling with historical inequalities (Tunjera & Chigona, 2021; Mkuti & Aucamp, 2024). And even though, to an extent, virtual learning has diminished amongst non-distance learning HEIs, in post-COVID-19, the absence of a formal digital learning management system (DLMS) in public universities in many countries meant that social network sites (SNSs) were adopted. These include sites such as WhatsApp, and/or other digital communication platforms, particularly Microsoft (MS) Teams and Zoom which have been highly utilised to support T&L and sustain active academic interactions.

The benefits of SNS for academic purposes, including instructional delivery and collaborative have been evident (Sobaih, Hasanein, & Abu Elnasr, 2020; Deng & Tavares, 2013; Jong, Lai, Hsia, Lin, & Liao, 2014; Awidi, Paynter, & Vujosevic, 2019). In most instances, learning through digital networks have enhanced academic performance,

foster informal scholarly exchange, support community building, promote trust and user satisfaction, improve connectivity, and enrich students' overall learning experience (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee, 2009, Lambić, 2016 & Yildiz Durak, 2019).

The previously described studies underscore the evolving role of the *lecturertainer* a term introduced in this paper which describes an educator who effectively integrates social networking sites to engage students, enhance communication, and enrich the learning experience in dynamic and interactive ways.

4.3 The Risks of Digital Distraction

Today's traditional-aged college students are avid recreational users of mobile technology (Flanigan & Babchuk, 2022). Technology enables a more sustainable and universally accessible educational model. However, despite the benefits which technology presents, there are a few challenges that can also present a paradox in students' academic lives. For instance, while technology facilitates engagement in learning activities, to some extent, it can also serve as a significant source of distraction (Pérez-Juárez, González-Ortega, & Aguiar-Pérez, 2023). As such, continuous class monitoring is required to ensure that students are actively engaged in the class activities. Social media, in particular, has become deeply embedded in the daily routines of university students. Often referred to as the Net Generation comprising students who are accustomed to constant connectivity and the pervasive use of digital tools (Tapscott, 1998, Flanigan & Kiewra, 2018). While these technologies offer innovative opportunities for learning, research shows that university students frequently use their devices—such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops—for non-academic, off-task activities (Pérez-Juárez et al., 2023). This dual nature of technology in higher education highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing its educational potential with its distracting tendencies.

The major concern accentuated in Flanigan and Babchuk (2022) is that, despite being essential for learning, digital devices are simultaneously posing a threat to students' concentration and creativity. Often times diminishing students' learning and achievement as a result of unwarranted distractions. In response, the implementation of explicit classroom technology-use for class activities only may curb distractions and foster a more focused learning environment. Nonetheless, maintaining student attentiveness in a technologically enriched classroom may become a daunting task.

In light of the techno-developments aiding T&L, *Lecturertainers* still need to strike a balance between entertainment and being rigorous to ensure their relevance particularly in a techno-revolutionised world. The use of AI and gamification as shown in this paper signals that teaching remains interesting for students. However, as Arthur (2009) indicated, lecturers have also signaled the importance of having fun, not only for students but also for staff. The reality which still remains applicable, and may go beyond 2025.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

The concept of the *lecturertainer* represents an innovative evolution in higher education as introduced by the authors. It blends the traditional role of a lecturer with the engaging qualities of an entertainer to foster deeper student engagement and improve learning outcomes. This hybrid approach responds to the modern classroom's demand for creativity, interactivity, and learner-centered techniques. The *lecturertainer* employs storytelling, humor, multimedia tools, and performance-based strategies to present content in an accessible, memorable, and stimulating manner, while still upholding academic rigour. As attention spans decline and students increasingly respond to dynamic content, this approach aims to bridge the gap between pedagogy and performance.

To successfully implement the *lecturertainer* model, several recommendations are worth considering. Institutions should invest in professional development workshops to equip educators with skills in communication, storytelling, and digital tool use. Blended learning techniques enhance the learning experience. It is critical, however, that all entertaining elements align closely with the learning objectives to maintain content integrity. Thus, encouraging continuous feedback from students can help to fine-tune delivery methods, while adapting the approach to the cultural and disciplinary context for relevance. Additionally, academic performance reviews should recognise and reward innovative teaching approaches, thereby legitimising the *lecturertainer* within formal structures.

Despite its promise, the newly introduced *lecturertainer* model is not without limitations. An overemphasis on entertainment risks diluting the seriousness of academic content and may lead to perceptions of superficiality. The high levels of energy and creativity required to perform consistently can result in educator burnout. For

instance, other HEIs across the globe, such as in Thailand also indicate growing cases in educator burnout which require the adoption of a balanced workload and mental health support systems (Pakdee, *et al.* 2025). Furthermore, not all lecturers possess the personality traits, training, or institutional support necessary to adopt this model effectively, which may lead to disparities in student experience. Students themselves may begin to expect constant stimulation, potentially diminishing their engagement with more traditional academic tasks. In certain disciplines or cultural contexts, the performative nature of the *lecturertainer* may clash with established norms or expectations of academic professionalism. Lastly, assessing the effectiveness of this approach remains a challenge, particularly if evaluations focus solely on student satisfaction rather than measurable academic achievement. While the *lecturertainer* introduces exciting possibilities, its success depends on careful, context-sensitive implementation and ongoing evaluation.

6. Conclusion

In closing, this paper introduced the concept of the *lecturertainer* to capture the evolving, and often precarious, identity of modern educators navigating between pedagogy and performance. As Wong and Chiu (2019) aptly argue, the expanding expectations placed on lecturers demand urgent institutional and national dialogue to redefine their roles with greater clarity and support. Until such boundaries are meaningfully addressed, the university lecturer will continue to juggle multiple personas—mentor, content expert, service provider, and entertainer—balancing academic rigor with the need to captivate a digitally distracted generation in need of instant achievements. Thinking forward, we believe that the expanding role of lecturers merits an urgent review at the institutional and national level. This broader consideration will enable HE policy-makers to promote and ensure clarity of the boundaries and expectations of teaching staff. Until then, we also agree with Wong & Chiu (2019) observations that the identities of lecturers remain precarious. They are supportive tutors, service providers and in some cases, *Lecturertainers* who need to ensure that pedagogy motivates and promotes students' active learning and critical thinking.

Ethics and AI Declarations

We declare that we are fully aware of the stance taken by the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Humanities, regarding the importance of obtaining informed consent from all research participants. This study is devoid of Human participants. We, therefore, deem it impossible to obtain such consent in the current research project. An Ethics Waiver for Qualitative Study has been submitted to the IIE Research Ethics Committee (IIE REC). We declare that, during this research, we have observed all academic integrity criteria by taking due care to protect and safeguard the intellectual autonomy of all academic resources supporting this research project. We declare that this project is an original work of the authors, and no AI tools were used in its creation.

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