

Challenges Faced by Students in Mother Tongue Administered Assessments in Higher Education

Nontokozo Mashiya

*School of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, P/ Bag X 03, Ashwood 3605, South Africa
Telephone: +27 31 260 3670, Fax: +27 31 260 7003,
E-mail: mashiya@ukzn.ac.za*

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ABSTRACT Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in all spheres of education and higher education is no exception. It determines whether or not the outcomes set for a particular module are achieved. Therefore, the accessibility and inclusivity of assessment to enable all students to fully demonstrate the quality of their learning is important. This paper focuses on assessments administered in mother tongue – isiZulu in one South African university. This follows the initiative of teaching in a medium of instruction of an African language as the constitution of South Africa encourages the promotion of these languages. A Foundation Phase programme within the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualification is delivered in a dual medium of instruction of English and isiZulu. IsiZulu speaking students were taught and assessed in isiZulu and some materials given to them were written in both languages. It was therefore vital to investigate the feelings and the challenges of these students as they were lacking in isiZulu since they received their basic education in English medium schools and hence could only converse in isiZulu. Challenges encountered by these students during the assessment period and the impact it had on their performance were investigated. The study is qualitative in nature and is located within the interpretive paradigm. Using purposive sampling, two of these students who were in isiZulu class were identified. Data was generated through interviews, observations during class presentations and an analysis of students' work. Data revealed complex feelings such as uncertainty, anxiety and frustration that students encountered during assessments. It further shows that students battled to understand instructions and could not spell words correctly when expressing their views in a test and examination. The paper argues that those involved in the modules offered in mother tongue should give students instructions that are written in mother tongue as well as in English to enhance their understanding.