



HODs' views on their capacity to conduct moderation of School Based Assessment in Tourism

Zanele HW Dube-Xaba*
University of KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa
E-mail: dubez@ukzn.ac.za

and

Malehlonono P Makae
University of KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa

Corresponding author*

Abstract

The new South African National Curriculum Statement recommends a change in assessment practices which requires schools to place more emphasis on continuous assessment as an integral part of learning, teaching and assessment. It was against this background that a school-based assessment (SBA) component was introduced in the National Senior Certificate Examination. The underlying principles of this new assessment mode also have implications for quality assurance processes such as moderation which the head of department (HOD), as a curriculum manager, is responsible for. This implies that successful implementation of SBA not only depends on the teacher's conceptual understanding, but largely on how HODs play their role in terms of moderating it. The study investigated the role of HODs in moderating SBA in secondary schools, with the specific aim of determining their capacity to conduct SBA moderation in Tourism. This was a qualitative study which conducted semi-structured face to face interviews with one HOD from each of four schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The participants were purposively selected because they were managing Tourism as a subject. The results revealed that the HODs were not capacitated to conduct SBA moderation in Tourism. This was attributed to a lack of training as well as insufficient Tourism content knowledge. Available evidence suggests that, in order to promote quality SBA, there is a need for capacity development among HODs as they are mainly responsible for moderation at the high school level.

Keywords: School Based Assessment, moderation, Head of Department, tourism

Introduction

Tourism studies as indeed each curriculum, characterizes a choice as to which method to use in the education of students. An intellectual approach puts emphasis on how learners can learn and make sense of the world in which they live, and in the process be more creative and productive in society once they are work ready. This calls for teachers who are well versed in a subject and its teaching content. It also necessitates that SBA moderation in the Tourism be of a high quality so that the desirable suitable outcomes are met. The current South African school curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) recommends a change in assessment practices which requires schools to put more emphasis on continuous assessment as an integral part of learning, teaching and assessment (Le Grange & Beets, 2005). Assessment aims to be integrated into the process of teaching and learning providing feedback to both learners and teachers with the intention of improving learner performance. It was against this background that a school-based assessment (SBA) component was introduced in the National Senior Certificate Examination. SBA is a formal and important part of the evaluation of South African learners from Grades R-12 (Van der Berg & Shepherd, 2008). It comprises of various forms of assessment conducted by the teacher who develops tasks and administers them to learners (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Poliah, 2009).



Alongside the introduction of SBA, quality assurance measures such as moderation have been adopted to uphold the principles of assessment such as fairness, reliability and validity (Maxwell, 2006; Seobi & Wood, 2016). Moderation is therefore the cornerstone of quality assurance to ensure that SBA adheres to acceptable standards. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011) outlines the processes to be followed in moderation while Umalusi (the General and Further Education Quality Assurance Agency) has developed directives for quality assessment that have impacted on the implementation of moderation in schools.

SBA is a compulsory component for progression and promotion in the different school phases, with clear prescriptions for the percentage it contributes to learners' end-of-year mark (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013). It constitutes 50% of the total promotion mark in Tourism due to the inclusion of the Practical Assessment Task (PAT) which is administered and moderated in the same way as SBA. The CAPS suggests seven tasks for continuous assessment in Tourism, six SBA tasks and the end-of-year examination (a written examination and PAT). The SBA tasks contribute 25% to the final mark, while the end-of-year examination contributes 75%, of which 25% is allocated to the PAT and 50% to the written examination. In Grades 10 and 11 all assessment tasks (SBA, the PAT and the written examination) are internally set, marked and moderated while in Grade 12, SBA tasks are internally set and marked and externally moderated; the PAT is externally set, internally marked and externally moderated; and the written examination is externally set, marked and moderated (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Given that SBA and the PAT have a significant weighting in determining learners' progress in Tourism, they need to be moderated for rigorous control and quality assurance (Poliah, 2009).

Internally, moderation is done at various levels, including the school, district and province/national level, while Umalusi is responsible for external moderation. This paper focuses on one level of internal moderation, school moderation. Internal moderation should ensure that SBA is consistent, accurate and well designed. At school level, it is the core responsibility of the head of department (HOD), who is a curriculum manager. Grobler, Loock and Govender (2012) emphasise that the HOD is also responsible for maintaining the standard of assessment practice in schools and ensuring that teachers have a good understanding of assessment policies. This implies that successful implementation of SBA not only depends on the teacher's conceptual understanding, but largely on how HODs play their role in moderating it. In conducting written subject assessment, the question paper or task is first submitted to the HOD for moderation as a quality assurance measure before it is given to learners (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Maxwell (2006) identified two phases in the moderation process. The first phase is pre-moderation which involves moderation of the assessment instrument prior to administering it to learners. The moderator, the HOD in this case, verifies content coverage, the level of difficulty, distribution of question types, and grammar. This is done to ensure the validity, fairness and reliability of the instrument. The second phase is post-moderation that involves moderation of learner evidence. The HOD moderates a sample of learners' performance in order to ensure accuracy in marking, fair distribution of marks and learner achievement of outcomes.

The Protocol on Moderation and the CAPS issued in 2011 stipulate different stakeholders' involvement at different levels of assessment by introducing an accountability mechanism to teaching and learning. These policies differ from previous models where moderation was solely the responsibility of the subject advisor external to the school and was conducted once at the end of the year. The policy gives clear guidelines on the number of assessment tasks and the forms of assessment in Tourism, however, the policy does not give clear directive on the standard and the quality of these tasks. Individual teacher teaching the subject thus has to decide on what content knowledge and skills to assess. In essence, the quality of the assessment task depends highly on what each Tourism teacher regards as a good standard



and quality. However, since the implementation of the NCS, challenges have arisen in moderation of SBA in schools. The literature has highlighted various challenges regarding the implementation of assessment practices in South Africa. This includes the poor quality of the assessment tasks set by teachers; the task validity is low and the marking tool is unreliable creating discrepancies in the allocation of marks, the most is the poor distribution weighting of cognitive demands and levels of difficulty (Umalusi, 2009; Polliah, 2010; Motsamai, 2017). Thus quality assurance by means of internal moderation is crucial. The question of how schools are dealing with moderation, which is the role of the HOD as an instructional curriculum leader, is at the heart of the practice of assessment and quality assurance at schools. As stated previously, in the South African context, Umalusi has responsibility for maintaining standards and has put processes in place to ensure that SBA is reliable, valid and fair. However, this body is currently only involved in quality assessment in Grade 12 gateway subjects, of which Tourism is not one. This implies that moderation in Grade 10-12 Tourism is mainly internal under the direct control of the school, conducted by the HOD. Hence, this study examines the capacity of HODs to conduct moderation of SBA in Tourism. Its value lies in the fact that it offers a description of a particular case study in a district and schools at a particular time.

Context

We chose to place this study within Tourism as a subject in Grades 10-12 in secondary schools in South Africa as it is one of the new vocational subjects currently offered in the NCS at this level and also due to the fact that tourism is a major sector in the economy. Tourism has been introduced within the formal secondary school curriculum in many countries due to its increased contribution to economic growth (Dube, 2014; Hsu, 2015; Mayaka & Akama, 2015). South Africa was no exception and after 1994, the democratic South African government introduced more practical and vocationally oriented subjects such as Tourism at secondary school level (Grades 10-12) (Adukaite, Van Zyl, Cantoni, 2016). Adukaite, et al (2016) further state that post-apartheid South Africa suffered a lack of skilled human resources and high levels of unemployment which saw the introduction of more vocationally orientated subjects as a strategy to address these issues (Chili, 2013).

Tourism content embeds industry practice which reflects situations and vectors of influence likely to be found in real-world settings. It has become one of the most popular electives in Grades 10-12; Shalem and Allais (2014) indicate that more than 20% of schools offer Tourism as a subject. However, very little research has been conducted on this subject in South African secondary schools (Van Niekerk & Saymaan, 2013; Chili, 2013, 2014; Dube, 2014, 2016; Dube-Xaba, 2017). Moreover, no existing studies focus on the implementation of Tourism teaching, learning and assessment in such schools. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining HODs' capacity to conduct moderation of SBA in Tourism.

Research Methodology

This was an interpretive qualitative study using a case design. As suggested by Edmond and Keddy (2013), adopting an interpretive qualitative case study design allows us to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013), in the case of this study, the capacity of HODs in conducting SBA moderation in Tourism. An interpretive qualitative approach as explained by (Betrum and Christiansen (2014) puts emphasis on the meanings that people attach to their own experiences. The study used both convenience and purposive methods to select the four schools and four participants, the names of which are not disclosed for reasons of confidentiality. Convenience sampling was used because we sought schools in the same cluster that were not far from each other, thus minimising travel costs. Sampling was purposive in the sense that, we targeted HODs that are managing Tourism in their departments. Their participation was critical as they are directly responsible for conducting moderation in Tourism. Data was generated by means of face-to-face, semi-structured



interviews which enabled the participants to speak freely and comfortably share ideas, and allowed us as researchers to probe further and followed-up with participants to validate data as suggested by Creswell (2012). The semi-structured interviews as suggested by Tracy (2013) also gave the HODs ample opportunity to express their views on their capacity to conduct SBA moderation in Tourism.

All four HODs teach at schools that are ranked as quintile three. The quintile ranking is an indication of a school's socio-economic status, with quintile 1 schools located in poor communities while quintile 5 schools are found in the least poor communities (South Africa, DBE, 2006). Quintile 1-3 schools are no fee schools and are prohibited from charging fees.

HOD1 has 13 years teaching experience, eight years as an educator and five as an HOD and is a History and Geography specialist. HOD2 has been teaching for 14 years, eight years as an educator and six as an HOD and is a History specialist. HOD3 has 34 years teaching experience, 15 as an educator and 19 years as an HOD specialising in Physical Sciences. HOD4 has been teaching for 13 years, four years as an educator and nine as an HOD specialising in History and Geography.

Interviews for all four HODs participating in this study were conducted at their respective schools after working hours so as not to interfere with teaching time. The interviews were tape-recorded in order to ensure accuracy as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011). The recorded interviews were transcribed into textual form for qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014). As proposed by Hatch (2002), inductive analysis was employed to search for patterns in the data. Based on Hatch's guidelines and bearing in mind the study's aims and the research questions, we developed categories of analysis from the data and themes for data presentation as recommended by Bertram and Christiansen (2014).

Findings

HODs lack competencies to conduct SBA Moderation

Despite the important role played by HODs as first level moderators (Department of Basic Education, 2011), the literature suggests that HODs at school level are not capacitated to carry out this role (Seobi, & Wood, 2016; Motsamai, 2017). The narratives of the HODs that participated in the study suggest that they were aware of their role in conducting SBA moderation, but were uncertain how to enact it due to inadequate training. The findings indicated that the HODs lack competencies to conduct SBA moderation, particularly in Tourism.

The participants noted that the assessment policies in their schools stipulate that they should conduct pre-moderation (i.e. moderation of papers/assessment tasks before they are administered to learners) and post-moderation (of learner evidence and marking after the tasks have been administered) for quality control purposes. All four acknowledged that they were not conducting moderation for Tourism as stipulated in the policies due to the fact that they were not appropriately equipped to moderate Tourism SBA and PAT. Furthermore, they revealed that they received no specific training to conduct SBA moderation in the various subjects they are responsible for, including Tourism.

The literature emphasises that it is impossible to successfully implement change in an education system if serious investment is not made in teachers and HODs' professional development (Hargreaves, 2003; OECD, 2005; Biputh & McKenna, 2010). The study participants added that the induction or training they received on managing curriculum did not equip them with adequate skills and/or knowledge, particularly in relation to assessment and moderation. One of the reasons for inadequate assessment and moderation skills could be that ongoing changes in the South African curriculum and assessment practices. Given that the three HODs (HOD1, 2 and



3) had less than six years' experience in this position they might not be capacitated with the required skills and responsibilities of the position. For HOD3 who has more close to twenty years practice in the position, might have experienced too many curriculum changes and could not acquire skills in the latest developments. This suggests that both novice and experienced HODs are not inducted and mentored in line with the requirements of their posts, particularly in assessment and moderation. This finding is in agreement with Biputh and McKenna (2010) who argue that HODs in South Africa are provided with minimal induction and mentorship which leads to poor curriculum implementation.

Furthermore, the HODs explained that the moderation training they attended was for their subjects and only capacitated them as specialists in these subjects rather than as moderators of other subjects. All four participants lamented the fact that they are not trained to conduct moderation in general and particularly in Tourism. HOD2 explained that she is not trained to conduct moderation, especially for subjects she does not specialise in, like Tourism which is a complex area as it covers a number of subjects. HOD1 concurred:

“No training was offered to us about conducting moderation in different subjects that we manage in the one day workshop that I attended. The facilitator did not focus on subjects such as Tourism in which assessment is not the same as in most of the subjects in our school.” [HOD1]

The participants further reported that induction workshops for School Management Teams (SMT) either spanned one day or a few hours. They felt they were of minimal assistance in capacitating them to conduct moderation, especially in Tourism which they were not familiar with. This finding resonates with the existing literature which states that it is impossible to successfully implement curriculum changes if implementers, especially at school level, have not been trained thoroughly (Todd & Mason, 2005; Maile, 2013). It points to the need for in-depth training which extends beyond short workshops. Without comprehensive training and support from either the Provincial Education Department or subject advisor, HODs had to make sense of assessment policies and conduct moderation in all the subjects they manage. Some of the participants reported that they were issued with the SMT toolkit at the workshops, but this addresses a number of issues and is not confined to assessment and moderation. Furthermore, as HOD 3 explained, some did not use the toolkit:

“I got the SMT toolkit from the deputy principal who attended the workshop but I was not trained on how to use it. The toolkit only gives the forms and there is no guidance on the standards of moderation especially for Tourism which is the only subject in my department with a PAT, so I use the forms to check if they have all the tasks.” (HOD3)

These findings suggest that HODs require capacitation to conduct effective and rigorous moderation in Tourism. Given the constant changes to the curriculum, one would expect the Provincial Department of Education to have systems in place to lend sustained support to teachers (Reynek, Meyer & Nel, 2010), and especially since the majority of the HODs are not specialists in most of the subjects they manage and support.

HODs lack Tourism content knowledge to conduct SBA moderation in Tourism

HODs should moderate assessment to ensure that tasks comply with certain requirements such as the content and cognitive levels stipulated in the policies. Therefore, effective moderation is dependent on their subject content knowledge. However, all four participants that were HODs for Tourism were not Tourism subject specialists and lacked subject content knowledge for effective moderation. They acknowledged that it was challenging for them to moderate Tourism SBA tasks as they did not have expertise in the subject, nor were they taken through the PAT moderation process. HOD2 responded:



“I am not familiar with the content knowledge in Tourism and not to mention the PAT.” (HOD 2)

HOD3 explained that she is a Physical science specialist and there is no PAT in this subject. Moderating the PAT was thus a challenge because the terminology is difficult and she reported that all she did was check and complete the forms. This implies a lack of competency to moderate SBA and the PAT in Tourism. HOD1 is also not a qualified Tourism teacher and admitted that she had no Tourism content knowledge. She added that she could not determine whether or not a question is correct because of the huge differences between designing test questions in her subject and in Tourism. These HODs are specialists in only one subject and subject knowledge and pedagogy is thus of major concern (Chili, 2013). In line with these findings, previous studies have demonstrated that the HODs do not have adequate knowledge of how to cope with the demands of teaching, and assessing as well as managing the curriculum (Maile, 2013; Seobi & Wood, 2016). This has implications for assuring quality assessment through moderation by HODs.

Although the HODs were aware of the policy on moderation, they experience challenges in implementing it, particularly in Tourism, as they are required to conduct pre-moderation (examining the design of the assessment task) and post-moderation (scrutinizing the allocation of marks for learner responses). The underlying principle of moderation requires that HODs should assure the quality of question items and accurate marking of responses. However, the data indicates that although all the participating HODs ardently declared their role as school moderators, it became apparent of SBA that they find it difficult to conduct moderation in Tourism because they lack the needed subject content knowledge. For example, HOD4 said:

“I just rely on what the teacher has set and marked because I don’t know the subject and cannot comment on the accuracy, relevancy and quality of question items or on the accuracy of marking of responses. In that case, I just provide my signature and school stamp as a sign of approval.” (HOD4)

The participants acknowledged that they did not moderate the marking of sampled scripts and question items which are the bases for moderation due to their lack of Tourism content knowledge. Thus, moderation seems to be confined to the HODs’ approval which is signified by their signature and the application of a school stamp with no feedback on the quality of the development of SBA and the PAT. This finding is consistent with those of other studies that point to poor moderation at school level (Polliah, 2010; Maile, 2013; Motsamai, 2017). In short, HODs’ involvement in moderation amounts to ‘rubber stamping’ tasks submitted by teachers without any developmental input. Moderation of SBA in Tourism is not enhancing the quality of teaching and learning but is simply undertaken in order to comply with requirements at the expense of quality (Seobi, & Wood, 2016). This is not surprising given that all the HODs that participated in this study are not specialists in Tourism, but in History or Physical Science and inherited Tourism in their Departments. These results are consistent with those of other studies such as Motsamai (2017) that suggest that, without appropriate subject matter knowledge, it is difficult to assure the quality of tasks and support teachers in designing assessment activities.

Drawing on the perspective that moderation is about assuring quality in assessment, one of the qualities of a good moderator is knowledge of subject content. It is thus essential that HODs are capacitated with skills to conduct moderation in subjects which are not their original area of specialisation.

Conclusion

The study’s findings suggest that, firstly, the HODs that participated were largely not effective in conducting moderation of SBA in Tourism. This indicates that there is insufficient quality assurance in the moderation of Tourism SBA conducted by the HODs in the schools that



participated in this study. This was attributed to the fact that, in the first instance, they did not receive adequate training to conduct moderation. For example, the findings show that the training for SMTs spanned one to two days. Secondly, the HODs lacked content knowledge to conduct SBA moderation in Tourism. The participants agreed that they conducted moderation simply for the purpose of compliance and not to assure quality and improve teaching and learning. They acknowledged that they battle with content knowledge and thus, cannot verify whether or not the tasks are of the required standard to measure outcomes in Tourism. These findings suggest that moderation of SBA in the participating schools occurs with no constructive engagement of HODs with a view to improving teaching and learning. For instance, their conduct of moderation revealed a lack of deep insight into the essence of moderation. They generally appended their signatures without examining the quality of question items. This raises serious concerns about HODs' competence in managing curriculum delivery in schools.

The evidence suggests that in order to assure the quality of SBA, attention should be paid to capacity development of HODs as they are mainly responsible for subject moderation at a high school level. Continuous mentorship through in-service training in the form of team moderation and in-house workshops for HODs could contribute to upgrading their skills and introducing them to effective ways of moderating SBA and the PAT in Tourism. Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education should devise standards for moderators, especially HODs to adhere to, when moderating SBA and the PAT in Tourism. Given the universal nature of the teaching, learning, assessment and moderation of Tourism, it is likely that the problems associated with it in the schools in the district that was the location for this study, would be experienced elsewhere across the country. The study therefore serves as a basis for similar research in different contexts so as to make its findings more generalizable. Further research on SBA moderation in Tourism could provide a broader sample and comparisons of different school contexts.

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