Openness in Assessment Practices:

Reviewing Assessment in an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) environment

Presenter: Dr Lorette Jacobs
Puleng’s story

- Enrolled for a degree in Archives and Records Management (ARM) at a distance education institution.
- Full-time single mom of three.
- Works in a records management office of an architectural company.
- Lives in Zimbabwe, but studies via a University in South Africa.
- Thus far she has managed to complete her six first-year modules over a three-year period.
- She is currently enrolled for the module Appraisal and Disposal of Records.
- She has never organised records or made decisions about which records to keep and which to dispose of.
- There is no one else in her organisation with ARM experience and no other student in the area who is studying the above module.
- She feels isolated, anxious and demotivated.
Contextualised in an interpretive paradigm, a case study of the *Appraisal and Assessment of Records* module was employed to explore the following questions:

- What are the key challenges and trends in assessment practices in ODeL?
- What recommendations can be made to improve openness of assessment in ODeL?
Studying through an ODeL University

- **Open**
  - Engagement
  - Access to information
  - Various teaching, learning and assessment opportunities

- **Distance**
  - Temporal, spatial, economic, social, educational and communication distances between students and educators

- **e-Learning**
  - Technology to create a simulated learning environment
  - Synchronous and asynchronous engagement
  - Access to virtual resources

(Van Rooy & Madiope, 2012; Mafenya, 2016; Manyike, 2017)
Contextualising Assessment in ODeL

Number of undergraduate students enrolled at an ODeL University in South Africa

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In 2016 the ODeL institution produced:
- 19 546 graduates with undergraduate degrees
- 12 587 with undergraduate certificates and diplomas

(Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018:17, 2018:22)
Assessment in ODeL

“Assessment can be formal, non-formal or informal and can be of learning already done or towards learning to inform and shape teaching and learning still to be done.”

(SAQA, 2015:5)
Assessment in ODeL

In ODeL, assessment should...

- Be in the service of learning
- Integrated into teaching and learning
- Make judgements about competence
- Expand information transfer and knowledge application

Through assessment, opportunities should be created for students and educators to interact, share ideas, deliberate, review and reflect.
Assessment to promote ‘openness’

- Openness is required to provide opportunities for engagement.
- Create opportunities for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to engage in learning activities.
- Focus is on encouraging independent, self-directed and reflective students.
- Create opportunities to engage with content and the environment to enhance learning.

Cloete & Fehnel, 2004; Oliver, 2015; Singh, 2015)
Assessment Challenges and Trends in ODeL

- Technology use
- Assessment as learning
- Student centeredness
- Feedback and feed-forward
Technology

Challenges

- ‘Trojan mouse’ (Arinto, 2016)
- Over or incorrect use of tools can dissuade students and discourage engagement
- Lack of access to technology tools
- Incorrect instructions can be confusing
- ICT skills and competencies of lecturers and students
- Online assessments to be appropriate to objectives to be achieved

Trends

- Expanded assessment opportunities to support true purpose of formative assessment
- Various technology tools can create a variety of assessment opportunities to support stronger intelligences of students
- Promotes flipped classroom opportunities, gamification, software to promote interactive assessment engagement
- Encourages synchronous and asynchronous engagement with learning content
- Reduces feelings of isolation since students can engage in peer discussions as well as engagements with educators on assessment activities

Oliver, 2015; Gumbo, 2018; Gumbo, 2019
Assessment as learning

Challenges

• Friction between formative and summative assessment.

• Emphasis is still mostly on limited types of assessments where students have little opportunity to improve knowledge and understanding.

• Moving to a student-centered approach probably unfamiliar to students.

• Students are not necessarily involved in proposed assessment activities.

Trends

• Continuous assessment shift from assessment of and for learning to assessment as learning.

• Cyclical process will encourage a holistic understanding of module contents.

• Assessment opportunities should expand into performance-based learning, portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, group assessment, reflective journal writing and scaffolded essays.

• Various technology tools can be used to encourage assessment as learning.

• Assessment practices should purposefully encourage students to engage with the learning material.

Vaughan, 2014; Pokorny & Warren, 2016
Student-centred assessment

Challenges

- Emphasis is on measuring achievement instead of enhancing the learning experience.
- Emphasis on the lecturer as the sole selector of assessment activities and methods.
- Cultural and educational differences influence student-centered assessment.
- Assessment practices that do not support Africanisation and decolonisation continue to inform assessment practices.

Trends

- Assessment practices should promote increased student autonomy and self-regulated, self-determined learning.
- Students should be able to decide what to learn, monitor their learning and evaluate their own performances.
- Lived experiences based on communalism should inform assessment as learning.
- Assessment practices to be adapted to African realities and conditions.

Msila & Setlhako, 201; Oliver, 2015; Singh, 2015
Feedback and Feed-forward

Challenges

- Under-preparedness of students requires more detailed and in-depth feedback
- Feedback to assist students to identify gaps in their knowledge, but because of vast number of students this is not possible
- Limited detailed areas of improvement and the relevance of that towards future assessment activities

Trends

- Feed-forward to help students engage in continuous assessment activities
- Feed-forward to link to module outcomes so students will understand the purpose of different assessment activities
- Timeous, relevant feedback so that feed-forward can assist in guiding future assessment activities
- Peer and self-assessment practices to be promoted
- Develop interdependent relationships (ubuntu and ukama) to expand knowledge construction

Boud, 2000; Oliver, 2015; Mafenya, 2016
Assessment in the Appraisal and Disposal of Records module

The module explores different appraisal techniques and the influence of legislation and regulations on appraisal decisions. It aims to equip students with the ability to identify records of enduring value and appraise these in such a way as to ensure their easy retrieval.

Assessment activities include:

• Assessments per unit
• Online discussions
• Formative assignments
• Summative assessment
Reviewing assessment practices

- Alignment with curriculum and module outcomes
- Assessment provides reasonable opportunities to master outcomes
- Use of technology tools to encourage interaction with contents, self and peer assessment
- Provision for diversity of student learning
- Timeous and relevant feedback towards feed-forward process
- Relate it to real-life use of knowledge and skills outside the educational environment
The great ‘divide’

- Alignment between the curriculum and assessment
- Moving from knowledge to application
- Competency-based assessment
- Move from blended to online learning
- Use of alternative assessment practices
- Africanisation and decolonisation of the assessment process
- Feedback and feed-forward to support engagement between students and educators
- Synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for engagement
- Students as passive receivers of information
Considerations towards Open Assessment Practices

Integration of continuous assessment practices should be part of the initial planning and development of how a module is presented.

Educator should become the ‘meddler-in-the-middle’; where s/he encourages students, through critical questioning and guidance to explore assessment topics for themselves.

Feedback should assist students in forming accurate perceptions of their ability to achieve module outcomes.
Considerations towards Open Assessment Practices

Feed-forward is to be used as part of assessment for / as learning to prepare students sufficiently to engage in continuous assessments activities.

Feed-forward should link module outcomes to be achieved with assessment activities, so that students can understand the purpose and scope of engaging in different assessment activities.

Rubrics and pre-determined criteria to be made available to students as part of the feed-forward process, so that they understand what they will be assessed against.
Considerations towards Open Assessment Practices

Self- and peer-feedback may alleviate pressure from lecturers and encourage students to engage in the learning process, by encouraging them to not only evaluate their learning progress against pre-determined criteria, but also to provide feedback to each other on how to achieve learning outcomes.

Through *ukama*, students may develop interdependent relations, not just with the lecturer but also with each other to strengthen their knowledge construct, whilst the principles of *ubuntu* may be applied to promote sharing, compassion and respect.
Considerations towards Open Assessment Practices

- Enhanced use of technology tools to create assessment opportunities.

- Learning management system provides some opportunities, but these must be expanded through other social media tools such as Zoom, ooVoo, blogs, e-portfolios, digital libraries.

- Follow a continuous assessment process to support learning, instead of judging students’ abilities.
An ODeL framework may provide the environment that supports flexibility of learning by using varied technology tools.

With this statement in mind, how can openness of assessment in a distance education environment be promoted?
References


References


Thank you