The Challenges of Equity And Inclusion In Digitising High Stakes Assessments During the Pandemic

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Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing being enforced in countries across the world, led to partial or full closure of schools and universities in South Africa. To avoid total curriculum disruption, universities had no choice but to introduce technology-based pedagogy to ensure that learners have access to learning materials and provide assessments online. Clearly, it will take some time before institutions return to normal. This paper reviews the applicability of online assessments for academic recovery. It further sought to position the higher education sector on a new reality and its application of a new worldwide paradigm. A survey of pencilpaper and online testing was done with writers of the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs). A descriptive survey design using quantitative research approach was adopted to understand the students’ choice of the test. Results showed that online assessments had to be offered differently to a pencil-paper or face to face testing. Whilst strategies for online assessments were explored, with easy access on a digital platform, challenges of inequalities and accessibility were noted. A significant observation was that online assessments can only be effectively implemented in a digitally developed society. Covid-19 has leapfrogged education into the digital age and the future has to be embraced. A key recommendation is the need to re-imagine infrastructure in the context of digital transformation in higher education. Technology is mission critical and nonnegotiable for equitable accessibility of technology-based teaching and learning and assessment and that key connectivity issues be resolved as a priority.

Keywords: Equitable Access, Higher Education, Online Assessment, Pandemic, Technology-Based Learning