

ACADEMIC LITERACY PROGRAMME MODEL DESIGN

S. PACHAGADU AND K.J. DE BEER

ABSTRACT

The pass rate of grade 12 learners is shockingly low and this is supposed to be the feeding ground for Higher Educations in South Africa. Alet Rademeyer quotes from a document of Advocate Paul Hoffman, SC, and director of the Centre for Constitutional Rights, that the South African School System only delivers one out of 29 functional literate Black matriculants. It is a national crisis and is an indication of gigantic proportions. The aim of the Academic Literacy Programme (ALP) at the CUT is to improve student's academic literacy skills which will ultimately boost the student throughput rate at the CUT. The programme will help students develop their academic language skills whilst creating a positive attitude towards the English language.

Keywords: Academic Literacy, Access to Higher Education, ALP Programme at CUT.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 2008 academic year, 1552 first year students at the CUT participated in the Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes (PTEEP). The aim of the PTEEP was to test student's academic reading and writing skills. The results were astonishing as 79% of students failed the PTEEP. The poor pass rate led to the implementation of the Academic Literacy Programme (ALP) (Sebolai: 2008).

According to statistics of Hough & Horne literacy consultants (Rademeyer:2008) only two thirds of the 1, 56 million six year old Black pupils who started with their school career 12 years ago, completed grade twelve in 2007. Of these candidates 360 000 passed their final assessment at the end of grade twelve.

Dr Mbithi wa Kivilu in a Council of Human Scientific Research survey (Rademeyer:2008) found that when successful candidates were tested for literacy in English, only 15% of the 278 000 Black candidates were actually functionally literate. Fortunately, more and more Black parents are now in favour letting their children start off with mother tongue education up to grade 3.

This survey included 3000 respondents of all races. Afrikaans speaking parents preferred mother tongue education in the basic years. Interestingly, this survey reflected that race, monthly income and level of education mainly influenced the respondent's choices.

According to the survey, English remains the language of preference in Higher Education Institutions, followed by grade 10 to grade 12 and there after from grade 4 to grade 9. Over the last four years, Black parents progressively preferred mother tongue education for the academic foundation years of their children (Ibid).

Professor Mary Metcalfe, the then Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Witwatersrand, said that the scale on which Black learners have access to mother tongue education especially in urban areas where there are a multitude of mother tongue speakers and cultures, it will not be always possible. This is due to the limited number of languages that teachers can speak. It includes the scarcity of resources (Ibid).

“The total number is 42 000 Black school leavers who have the potential to conduct skilled work” says Rademeyer (2008). Each province in South Africa only delivered 4600 functionally literate candidates. According to Hoffman only 1 out of 29 (3,5%) of Black learners who entered the school system, came out with matriculation certificates which enable them to enter the levels for higher education instruction and skills training.

Hoffman (2008) continues that South African schools' drop out figure is 77% over the past 12 years of scholastic training while the international norm according to UNESCO's figures is 21%. Unfortunately the phenomenon of violence in schools is an obvious obstacle to quality assurance while the reluctance to insist on mother tongue education in the forming years of grade one pupils is also a factor for failure in the later grades according to educational specialists.

2. NEEDS AND SITUATION ANALYSIS

According to Hay & Sebolai (2007) one of the biggest challenges higher education institutions in South Africa are facing is the low academic language proficiency level of their student cohorts. The CUT, like other universities in South Africa, admits a great number of previously disadvantaged students with poor English language abilities.

Yeld (2003), Dean for the Faculty of Academic Development at the University of Cape Town, students require specific levels of knowledge and skills that are necessary for them to understand the ideologies that they will study at tertiary level. Failure to address student's shortcomings in academic language abilities at the CUT, will lead to unacceptable high failure rates, or lowered standards, as the institution attempts to avoid the inevitable consequences of educational under preparedness.

3. AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF CUT'S ALP

The aims and objectives of the ALP under the authority of the Unit for Academic Development (UAD) is to improve first year students' reading and writing skills in English and to use PTEEP, to assess the students academic language skills. This aims to give the test to all first year students during the first quarter and to use PTEEP to decide whether learners should take classes in the ALP. Students who pass the test are exempted from attending these classes while those who fail will be obliged to attend.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learning outcomes of the ALP and accreditation status is on NQF-level 5.

According to Van Wyk (2007) of the University of the Free State's, students must be able to use a particular strategy to organise and comprehend texts and identify and understand the functions of discourse markers in texts upon completion of the ALP. They must also be able to make inferences based on a given text. A further ability what ALP learners have to achieve, is to complete comprehension-based and problem-solving tasks accurately in the mode of written presentation as well as to write paragraphs and expository essays based on passages read. Finally, they have to be able to summarise the main ideas of a written text.

5. CONTENT

5.1 Intensive Reading

Intensive reading is a component of the ALP in which students rigorously read moderately short academic passages in class (one to two pages). A typical intensive reading lesson has three stages. These are the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages (Sebolai: 2008)

5.2 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is the major part of the ALP and graded readers are used for this component of the programme. At the beginning of the course, students take a reading proficiency test. They are then placed at different reading levels (2, 3 and 4) depending on their scores. A student reads ten books at one level (which implies written reading responses) before they move on to the next level (Sebolai: 2008).

5.3 Writing

The writing part of the course focuses on developing students' competence in expressing information/ideas clearly and logically in paragraphs and essays.

Students will focus on paragraph writing in the first semester and essay writing in the second semester (Sebolai: 2008).

5.4 Resources and other material

ALP-learners are exposed throughout the course to books, the Internet; periodicals; magazines and newspapers.

6. TEACHING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

ALP-learners are developed within the following contexts:

- Oral class/group discussion;
- Read extensively outside class;
- Write reading responses/paragraphs and essays; and
- Research assignments.

7. SPECIFIC AND GENERIC OUTCOMES

Van Wyk (2007) outlines the following specific outcomes such as completing comprehension-based activities and problem-solving tasks. This enables students to develop their English language reading skills. Students will then also be able to express their opinions about a variety of issues fluently, critically as well as creatively in the mode of oral discussion, to express information and opinions clearly with appropriate organisation in the written mode.

8. ASSESSMENT: CRITERIA, STRATEGY, METHODS, TECHNIQUES

8.1 Assessment Criteria

Once the module has been completed, students will be able to: read academic text with understanding. They will also be able to write coherent academic essays and process various sentence structures quickly and accurately in a comprehensible text. Finally, they will be able to accurately complete comprehension-based and problem-solving tasks in the mode of written presentation.

An Assessment Strategy Method

Semester 1

• Weekly quizzes (vocabulary)-based on the reading they do in class	4 x 5	= 20 marks
• Weekly reading reactions on Graded Readers	4 x 20	= 80 marks
• Paragraph writing	5 x 10	= 50 marks
• Summative Test		= 100 marks
Total marks		= 250 marks

Semester 2

• Weekly vocabulary quizzes	6 x 5	= 30 marks
• Weekly reading reactions	3 x 20	= 60 marks
• Essays	3 x 20	= 60 marks
• Summative Test		= 100 marks
Total marks		= 250 marks

Table 1: van Wyk (2008)

9. EVALUATION STRATEGY

A proposed evaluation strategy will be to conduct a coherent survey on the effectiveness of this programme for students furthering their studies in other programmes and to evaluate the performance of students who have completed the programme. Proper records are to be kept to research the effectiveness of this programme by establishing the progress of students in other programmes (Sebolai 2008).

10. THE WAY FORWARD

To adapt the ALP at the CUT to suit modern higher education standards, the Centre for e-Learning and Educational Technology (CeLET) should integrate the programme with Blackboard 6, Campus Edition to prepare learning materials and to enable learners to develop themselves academically in their own time. It forms part of the modern development of Open Learning trends such as at UNISA.

UNISA opened the very first Institute for Open Learning on the African continent during May this year on the recommendations of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). It will not only add value to learning and teaching, but also for research outputs said Professor Mandla Makhanya, pro-vice chancellor of UNISA in Pretoria (Makhanya:2008). In comparing higher education access for SA learners for instance with Egypt on the African continent, it is lower. Participation in higher education in SA is lower than 45% compared to the rest of the continent. Enrolments south of the Sahara are of the lowest in the world. Since 1965 it only increased from 1% to the current 5% stated Makhanya.

South Africa's participation in higher is 17% and the aim is to increase it to 20% by 2010. Open Learning and ALP could enhance both wider access as well as outputs. It provides better academic support to enhance quality higher education (Makhanya:2008).

11. REFERENCES

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