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Striking a Balanced Student-Centered Quality Assessment during Covid-19: A Case of Online Assessments for the Physiology Class of 2020Timothy Sibanda¹, & Lukas Matati Josua*²¹Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Biotechnology, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia²Department of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Namibia, Oshakati, Namibia**Article History**

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Abstract: Background: The uncharted territory due to COVID-19 enforced lockdowns experienced around the globe, called for digital enabled assessment in a higher education context. The quality of assessment of and for student learning during the pandemic is yet to be sufficiently explored. **Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to provide the concerns and challenges that teachers faced in a bid to strike a balance between ensuring quality assurance in online assessments and staying true to a desire to deliver a truly student-centered assessment experience to the students. **Method:** The paper employed an observation-based analysis of the concerns and challenges that teachers faced in a bid to strike a balance between ensuring quality assurance in online and student-centered assessment. The paper further discusses mechanisms to ensure quality, student-centered online-based assessments. While quality assurance in assessment covers a wide range of aspects such as assessment design, moderation, and feedback, we deliberately streamlined this paper to discuss the aspect of feedback and how it impacts student assessment for and of learning in an online learning environment. **Findings:** The findings, interventions and therefore conclusions arrived at in this paper are based mainly on our observations in the course of administering assessment to a 3rd Year Physiology at the University of Namibia. The paper found that when students cheat during the course of an assessment, they are less likely to engage with feedback that is given towards that assessment. Further, a teacher's knowledge of his/her students is more likely to help the teacher to give individualised student feedback that can go a long way into bridging the gap between current and intended learning. **Conclusion:** We conclude that the use of student agency in both assessment design and review can stand out to be the single most effective method of ensuring quality assessment with enhanced chances for lifelong learning.

Keywords: Assessment; e-Learning; Quality Assurance; Student Agency, Lifelong Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

While the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak started in 2019 in China, it was not until the year 2020 that the outbreak reached pandemic status, forcing world economies into forced lockdowns in a bid to contain the further spread of the virus. The pronouncement of a lockdown in Namibia in March 2020 forced the University of Namibia, like many other educational institutions around the world, to migrate its learning and teaching activities to online platforms. Student assessments, ranging from class tests to weekly laboratory-based practical assessments to end of semester examinations also had to migrate to online platforms, with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone from students to teachers to parents to prospective employers to regulatory bodies concerned with quality assurance in higher education. The concern among all these players was centered on one word - **quality**. There was widespread fear, justifiably so, that the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of assessments, and ultimately, the quality of the graduate, would be severely compromised. The fear was justified for two reasons; firstly, as observed by Hedding *et al.* (2020), "academic staff at contact universities typically have little, if any, experience or training in the pedagogy or delivery of online learning" (p. 1). And

secondly, because migrating to online learning platforms deprived students of the human face to education – engagement with peers and with the teacher. According to (Knight, 2002):

Engagement does not simply equate to the amount of involvement in and time on task, important though that is. It extends to learners' engagement in communities of practice, to their involvement in a variety of networks and to the amount and quality of interchanges with others. This is an endorsement of the neo-Piagetian position that cognitive engagements with others are powerful stimuli for learning, and of Vygotsky's analysis of learning as social acts. (p. 275).

Statement of the Problem

A perceived compromise in the pedagogy of online learning on the part of the teacher coupled with a deprivation of engagement on the part of the student gave rise to justified doubt about quality, both of the process and of the product. This sudden migration to online education raised concerns with regard to the quality of learning and teaching, curriculum development, assessment, as well as student research supervision. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to

provide the concerns and challenges that teachers faced in a bid to strike a balance between ensuring quality assurance in online assessments and staying true to a desire to deliver a truly student-centered assessment experience to the students.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted an observation-based analysis of the concerns and challenges that we, as teachers, faced in a bid to strike a balance between ensuring quality assurance in online assessments and staying true to a desire to deliver a truly student-centered assessment experience to the students. The paper discusses mechanisms to ensure quality, student-centered online-based assessments since, according to Lucander & Christersson (2020), when the quality of assessment and examinations is assured throughout an educational programme, the quality of the entire educational environment and students' performance is positively affected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a starting point, a brief review of the literature concerning quality assurance of the various forms of student assessment both in a normal higher education setting as well as in times of distress, such as are obtaining under the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted. This part presents the literature reviewed to frame the conceptualization of quality student-centered assessment in higher education context.

Student Assessment and Its Purposes

"...what influenced students most was not the teaching but the assessment." (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004).

Assessment can be defined as grading and reporting student achievements and supporting students in their learning (Hernández, 2012; Taras, 2010; & Vickerman, 2009). Traditionally, assessments are known to serve two main purposes - a formative and a summative purpose. Formative assessments, also called continuous assessments, are generally considered to be for student learning as they provide feedback that the students learn from (Evans, 2013). Because of their perceived value to learning, formative assessments are considered *assessment for learning*. Gikandi *et al.* (2011) define online formative assessment (assessment for learning) as, "the application of formative assessment within learning online and blended settings where the teacher and learners are separated by time and/or space and where a substantial proportion of learning/teaching activities are conducted through web-based ICT." (p. 2337). Meanwhile, summative assessments are considered evaluative, and to serve the purpose of certifying a level of attainment of a student at the point of completion of a course or program (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Because summative assessments (including end-of-semester examinations and final

presentations or projects) only occur at the end of the semester, and do not provide feedback to modify student learning, they are referred to as *assessment of learning*. However, both formative and summative assessment fulfil the evaluative purpose since they both contribute to the final student grade of our courses here at University of Namibia, and elsewhere too.

There is, however, yet a third purpose of assessment that is usually not considered. Its central feature is that students are considered as much more active players in the assessment process than is accommodated by summative or formative assessment, which are usually teacher-centered, with students being the subjects of assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Teachers think that for assessment tasks to be deemed quality, the whole process should be teacher-led. On the contrary, students tend to approach such teacher-led assessment activities mostly with the intent of passing examinations and/or obtaining a qualification while student-centered assessments are stimuli for both current and long-term learning. Boud and Falchikov (2006) argue that, "neither teachers nor a curriculum drive learning after graduation; it is the desires of learners, the initiatives they take and the context in which learning takes place that are powerful influences." (p. 402). In the next section, a review of the literature pertaining to quality assurance of online assessments is engaged.

Quality Assurance during Online Assessments

We begin this section by defining quality assurance in the higher education context. A survey of literature shows that quality is a philosophical concept with varying definitions depending on the perspectives of different stakeholders and society (Allam, 2020; Kundu, 2017; & Wang *et al.*, 2018). Among the different definitions of quality, Finch *et al.* (1994) present the following concepts of quality; conformance to specification or standards, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals, and quality as meeting customers' stated or implied needs. Of these, the most adopted definition of quality in higher education, and the one we are adopting in this paper, is that of fitness for purpose. The authors argue that this definition is developmental as it recognises that:

...purposes may change over time, thus requiring constant re-evaluation of the appropriateness of the specification. It may be used to analyse quality in higher education at a number of levels. For example, if the purpose of higher education is to provide an appropriately educated work-force, is the system as a whole providing the right number of graduates? Is a particular course providing the right balance of knowledge, skills and understanding? Is an institution achieving the purposes it set for itself in its mission statement? (p. 15).

In our case, the question to ask will be, “is there a balance between the nature and purpose of online assessments and student agency in the same?”

While online and blended learning have been increasingly becoming a common phenomenon of higher education since the turn of the 21st century (Gikandi *et al.*, 2011), the face-to-face mode of teaching and learning has largely remained the dominant mode in use. As a result, teachers have remained largely unskilled in the use of online pedagogy for quality teaching and student assessment. In addition, the lack or inadequacy of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) resources has also been a major stumbling block in universities’ desire to offer learning and teaching and assessment in blended format. However, the sudden eruption of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic practically left universities with two options, either to migrate all learning and teaching activities, as well as assessments to online platforms or to altogether cease operations for the duration of the pandemic. The popular, and needless to say, sustainable option, was to migrate to online learning platforms (e-learning). But, just how prepared were universities for online assessments, and not just assessments but quality online student assessments? This space is used to review literature about any pre-COVID-19 established protocols for ensuring quality during online assessments.

Hullabaloo about the Quality of Assessments

The quality of assessment is linked to its effectiveness in promoting current and future learning (Gikandi *et al.*, 2011). Comparing between formative and summative assessments, the authors argue that it is formative assessments that are of more value (quality) since the tasks are “embedded within instructions to monitor learning and assess learners understanding for the purposes of modifying instruction and informing further learning through ongoing and timely feedback until the desired level of knowledge has been achieved” (p. 2337). By comparison, they argue that summative assessments “may encourage surface learning and low order thinking because in most cases, *they assess declarative knowledge and basic application with no evidence of personal reflection and deep understanding*” (p. 2336). Biggs & Tang (2011) describe a surface approach to learning to mean students’ use of learning activities that are of lower cognitive level than are needed to achieve the outcomes, while a deep approach is when students use high level activities appropriate to achieving the intended outcomes. In addition, MacLellan (2001) suggests that the quality of assessments matters as it is related to how they embody meaningful and significant forms of human endeavour and accomplishment, and to how such tasks reflect the ways in which knowledge and skills are used in real world contexts.

Quality with Respect to Online Assessment for and of Learning

Similar to face-to-face learning environments, fundamental issues of assessment in e-learning need to be addressed if such assessment is to have desirable outcomes and therefore deemed to be of quality. While there may be many such issues, this section focuses on online assessment feedback.

Assessment feedback that is administered online is also called e-assessment feedback. E-assessment feedback is delivered or conducted through information communication technology of any kind, encompassing various digital technologies including CD-ROM, television, interactive multimedia, mobile phones, and the internet (Gikandi *et al.*, 2011). In the case of our students, they mostly rely on mobile phones, tablets, and laptop computers. E-assessment feedback is wide ranging in that it can be used to support individual and group learning. Evans (2013) defines assessment feedback as “all feedback exchanges generated within assessment design, occurring within and beyond the immediate learning context, being overt or covert (actively and/or passively sought and/or received), and importantly, drawing from a range of sources” (p. 71). She further points out that “a fundamental requirement of HE is to facilitate high-quality feedback exchanges” (p. 106). The functional aim of feedback should be to bridge the gap between the student’s level of performance and the desired learning goal (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008). In other words, feedback should have an impact on deep learning (Draper, 2009) and encourage lifelong learning. Feedback can assume either a cognitivist or a socio-constructivist framework, the distinction between them being that a cognitivist perspective assumes a directive giving “approach where feedback is seen as corrective, with an expert providing information to the passive recipient” (Evans, 2013). Whereas a socio-constructivist approach to feedback is seen as facilitative, making provision for comments and suggestions that enable students to make their own revisions and, in the process, helping students to gain new understandings in a non-dictatorial manner (Archer, 2010).

When a socio-constructivist feedback framework is followed, emphasis is placed on the dynamic nature of learning, with both the teacher and the student learning from each other through dialogue and participation in shared experiences (Carless *et al.*, 2011). Such interactions between participants in learning communities foster shared understandings, thereby contributing to the development of communities of practice, where the student increasingly takes responsibility for seeking out and acting on feedback. According to Nelson & Schunn (2009), assessment feedback should comprise three broad meanings as follows: motivational – wherein feedback influences beliefs and fosters a willingness to participate in students; reinforcement – wherein some specific

behaviours are either rewarded or punished; and informational – wherein an attempt is made to change performance in a particular direction. The quality of feedback is enhanced if it comprises an amalgamation of these elements, though of course their precise balance may be variable. These constructs, therefore, must be seen as integrated dimensions in the process of giving and receiving feedback. Enhancing the quality of feedback to students needs to be considered against the backdrop of the switch from face-to-face mode of learning to online platforms. The following are some online relevant socio-constructivist principles that foster holistic and iterative assessment feedback designs as drawn from Evans (2013); Boud (2000); & Juwah *et al.* (2004). They are such as: availing an adequate range and choice of assessment tasks throughout the study period, availing resources to students on virtual learning platforms from the start of a study period to enable them to organise their own learning, explaining to students the relevance of all assessment tasks and how they are linked together, providing students with explicit guidance on assessment requirements, ensuring that students undertake their assessments early enough to obtain feedback; clarifying the role of the student in the feedback process as an active participant and not as merely a passive receiver of feedback, providing opportunities for students to work with assessment criteria and to work with examples of good work, providing clear and focused feedback on how students can improve their work, including signposting the most important areas to address, and, training students in peer feedback possibilities.

On a parting note, and of course in the interest of quality, it is important to make a distinction between computer-generated scoring and e-assessment feedback where the former is only concerned with providing a mark with no feedback guidance. Emphasis should therefore be placed on the later. E-assessment feedback is touted for encouraging students to adopt deeper approaches to and greater self-regulation of learning, including higher achievement and retention rates (Ibabe & Jauregizar, 2010) through the provision of more relevant and authentic assessment feedback experiences (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011). In addition, there are three important variables to be considered for enhanced student engagement and performance outcomes during e-assessment feedback. These include the level of academic challenge, the extent of active and collaborative learning, and the extent and quality of student-faculty interactions. Admittedly, the bulk of this review pertains to formative assessment/assessment for learning as this kind of feedback is rarely given in assessment of learning/summative assessment. In the next section, the challenges faced with respect to administering assessment e-feedback to 3rd Year Physiology class in 2020 are discussed.

Challenges Associated With E-Feedback

Physiology MBL3771 is a third-year module offered by the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Namibia. By the time the President declared, and consequently a transition from face-to-face mode of instruction to online mode, lecturer had barely physically met any of the students in class. This module comprises of both theory and a laboratory-based practical component, both of which had to be offered to students using online platforms during the lockdown period. For the practical component, students were assessed using YouTube Videos accompanied by a combination of multiple-choice and short answer quizzes while the theory component was assessed using a combination of multiple-choice tests, short answer tests and essays, mostly in assignment format. Feedback was administered for both components using a combination of WhatsApp messages – both in group and individual format, where the student seemed to have a unique challenge that needed individual intervention, learning management systems (LMS) – and in our case, Moodle LMS, and on rare occasions, emails and telephone calls. Tailor made feedback was endeavoured to individual learning needs as much as the situation required, there were still a number of challenges that diminished the quality of e-feedback, especially with respect to assessment for learning, as described below:

System Shock

This was the major challenge to everything associated with online-based assessed and the associated feedback – both to lecturer and students. A number of factors contributed to the ‘shock’, as follows:

- **Facelessness:** by the time the President declared a lockdown, and consequently a transition from face-to-face mode of instruction to online mode, there was no physical meeting between students and lecturer. This made it very difficult to tailor feedback to an individual student’s needs, save for those that were regular class attendees and participants. In a large way, this affected the quality of the feedback that was given in the assessment for learning. The situation was also exacerbated by instructor’s unawareness of the students’ socio-cultural backgrounds, which could have been alleviated had there been initial students profiling before commencement with both lessons and assessment activities.
- **Lack of experience and adequate training in the use of Moodle LMS for administering assessment and feedback:** The same affected students who could not figure out how to submit their assessments on Moodle, or how to access the lecturer’s feedback. The ensuring trial and error method of assessing and administering feedback compromised the quality of assessments because the facilitator ended up having to do the barest minimum, which often was to allocate a mark, mostly without a comment.

Cheating

The second major challenge, with some links to the one already discussed, was cheating. Because we left online assessments open and available for longer than would usually be the case in face-to-face scenarios, students exploited that opportunity to cheat. This they did using a number of ways including: (a) foreknowledge of the assessment questions – whereby students who took the assessments last obtained the questions from those who took the assessments first though it is not clear whether this was done for a fee or not, (b) use of external resources – whereby students made use of the internet or their notes to help them tackle the given tasks, mostly in online tests and/or quizzes, (c) cheating by proxy – whereby students would ask a friend or even pay someone else to take the assessment on their behalf. A combination of factors like lack of preparedness plus pressure to, succeed and perform could have been behind the observed cheating. The overall effect of cheating, however, is that it reduced assessment (of whatever form it is) to a mark accumulation exercise which did not benefit the student at all. In the majority of cases, when students copy to complete an assessment task, they are more concerned with the mark/score that they get other than the feedback from the lecturer.

Students Not Engaging With E-Feedback

In such cases, assessment feedback simply did very little to impact the student's learning, or to bridge the gap between current and intended learning, and so defeated the purpose of assessment for learning. A number of factors could have contributed to this; first being the fact that the formative assessments had a dual purpose, that of grading for the purposes of a calculating continuous assessment (CA) marks, and that of improving student learning through feedback. It appears that some students were more concerned with 'seeing their marks' than they were concerned with the feedback. In fact, students appeared to be concerned more with their CAs than with how much they were learning. Another factor that made students pay no attention to assessment feedback was lack of resources in terms of electronic gadgets, data, and/or internet access. Students that relied only on mobile phones and stayed in remote areas of the country had the most difficulty in accessing or paying attention to assessment feedback as to them, the sheer effort of submitting the assessment was enough to stress. Because of lack of adequate resources, some students barely attended any virtual classroom sessions and were unknown till that moment when a lecturer came across their assessment task in the inbox, and to make it worse, they did not respond to requests for their mobile number contacts – which only showed that they were not engaging with feedback.

Lack of Motivation

When an opportunity to meet one of the students in the Physiology Class came, she remarked

that, "...the home environment is not the best for learning. I was not motivated at all to do anything school-related, I submitted my assessments only because I knew that if I did not, then I would not be eligible to write the exam." Moreover, true, some students are motivated to learn only when they are in a 'proper school environment'. Such students construct knowledge and understanding in a social context through dialogue with others and with the teacher, in a face-to-face environment. The online learning and teaching, and the assessment, simply does not work for them!

Teacher-centered Assessments

Without really being aware of it, it was realised that feedback (starting with the assessment tasks themselves) were teacher-centric, based on a cognitivist framework. Because students were viewed as passive recipients of assessment and feedback, which may be too directive and lacked motivation. Upon reflection, it was realised this could also have contributed to lack of motivation and engagement as already discussed above, and eventually, negatively affected the assessment for learning.

The above cited challenges mostly impacted the quality of assessments for learning (formative assessments) as summative assessments mostly came at the end of the semester when lecturers had already gathered enough of on the job training and experience. The next section discussed how agency may be used in enhancing the quality of assessments e-feedback.

Interventions

The transition of learning and teaching from face-to-face to online may, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, be a forced move. However, this transition has not been all doom as institutions of higher learning around the world, as well as students, parents, teachers, and even governments have come to the realisation that 'full time' university students can actually access university education without necessarily being 'on campus'. This means that the same education can be achieved at much lower costs and maybe added convenience too, especially on the part of students and parents. Therefore, it is likely that even when the COVID-19 pandemic is finally contained, universities will adopt a blended learning and teaching approach. Nevertheless, that will mean first instituting measures to curb against the presently known challenges associated with e-learning. We believe that while some challenges may require government and/or parents' interventions, the solution to most of the cited challenges lies with the real of a combined student-teacher agency, as discussed below.

Student Profiling

Developing a student profile will help address the challenge of facelessness as earlier discussed. It will help the teacher to know the students as much as it will

also help students to know themselves better. This is very important in an online setting where student and teacher are physically separated by distance. In addition, understanding one's students will not only help a teacher to better design instruction and materials, but it will also offer learners a way to develop agency as they become more and more aware of how they learn best. Nyamupangedengu (2017) argues that a teacher's knowledge of his/her students is essential if the teacher is to choose teaching strategies that would enable epistemological access. The information gathered about individual students using a profiling tool can be used as a means for thoughtfully selecting learning and teaching strategies, as well as tailoring assessment feedback in such a way that will maximize student learning and achievement. We therefore motivate that student profiling done before learning and teaching commences so that it can contribute to student-tailored learning and teaching in real time.

Student-teacher agency in co-constructing assessment tasks

The challenges emanating from online cheating, students not engaging with e-feedback, lack of motivation, and teacher centred assessments could be tackled by tapping into combined student-teacher agency in various ways and levels. Online cheating is an age old problem for which numerous solutions have been instituted, including but not limited to creating questions that require higher order thinking, use of varied question types, setting the assessment task (e.g., online test) to show one question at a time, and prohibiting backtracking (Budhai, 2020). However, for as long as students feel as if teachers are playing cat, and they - mouse, cheating will continue. There still remains some methods well established in literature, and methods through which quality can be enhanced as much as student participation can be ensured - but methods which, unfortunately, are less practicalised.

One such method is teacher-student co-construction of assessments (Adie *et al.*, 2018; & Sadler, 1989). We here suggest that students can be dissuaded from cheating if they are involved in co-constructing assessment tasks. Burgess (2020) argues that when students know the purpose of assessment, they 'buy in' more freely, and are thus more invested in its success. Further, Adie *et al.* (2018) posit that a focus on student agency in assessment acknowledges students as actors who make choices, and whose actions shape assessment practices in both anticipated and unexpected ways. Williams (2017) argues that "...learning with agency is an entirely different cognitive and physical activity leading to powerful learners who choose to take on challenges with their whole being" (p. 10). The onus is therefore on agentic teachers to turn assessments into student-owned processes by allowing students partnership in the generation of assessment questions. Teachers' involvement can take the form of mentors and facilitators, and guarantors of quality by bringing

students back to the purpose and rationale of the course, rather than just rejecting student ideas. According to Wormeli (2020), the whole process must be based on student-teacher partnership in co-designing challenging but needed tasks, including criteria for success, and plans for intervention through coaching. Maximum emphasis should be on the student's voice and choice. Wormeli further asserts that the more students co-design their assessment tasks, and criteria for success, the more they take interest and engage in learning.

Student agency can also be harnessed in the form of group assignments and group assessments of the same. There are two major positives associated with this method, namely; connecting students into online communities of practice - which is what some students cited as a missing ingredient in their learning, and subsequently in their performance during assessment, and secondly, assessing social skills. Much as the intervention just discussed can be effective in combating online cheating in assessments, it is also a way to capture student imagination and therefore motivation, while it also goes a long way into solving the challenge posed by students' perceptions of assessments as teacher owned activities.

Peer Assessment and Student Agency

Traditionally, expectation is on teachers to both design assessments and construct quality feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; & Sadler, 2010), with the student expected to make meaningful use of the provided feedback. While teachers think that this approach is meant to preserve the quality of assessments and assessment feedback, the major downside of this approach is that students too often view feedback as the responsibility of someone else. In true fashion with my golden thread, "from teacher centered to student centered learning and teaching in hard sciences", we advocate for peer assessment to make sure that students play an active role in assessments. This is by far not a new phenomenon as it has been described by several authors already (Chen *et al.*, 2009; Double *et al.*, 2020; Tseng & Tsai, 2010).

Peer assessment has been defined by van der Pol *et al.* (2008) as a "method in which students engage in reflective criticism of the products of other students and provide them with feedback, using previously defined criteria" (p. 1805). Additionally, Gielen *et al.* (2011) put it as "an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status" (p. 137). Peer assessment is therefore an important step towards engaging students in the development of their own learning and self-assessment skills (Davies, 2006; & Topping, 2010), with mutual benefits to both the learner and lecturer (van den Berg *et al.*, 2006; & Vickerman, 2009). For the students, peer assessment feedback may be motivational as it promotes metacognition by enabling students to engage

in their own learning by knowing which learning, teaching, and assessment strategies work best for them. In addition, it helps them to monitor their own progress and that of others, adapt strategies and develop specific skills, enhance communication and interpersonal skills, and enable a sense of self-control (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2002). Further, Sadler (2010) suggests that the use of peer assessments enables students' conceptual understandings of task compliance, quality and criteria, and tacit knowledge, and challenges the view that only feedback from the lecturer should be the primary agent for improving learning if students are to develop capability in making complex judgments. The success of peer assessment, according to Wormeli (2020), depends on the combined urgency between the teacher and students in co-designing clear assessment criteria, and also in modelling how to self-reflect and peer assess using that criteria. The teacher should also provide techniques to guide students toward more reliable self-feedback and reflection that invokes thoughtful analysis of progress thus far, which then leads to helpful next steps in learning and growth, not comparison, status, or defensiveness.

This way, students are seen as partners in the feedback process, as also observed by Fluckiger *et al.* (2010). This approach also places much emphasis on the value of a the social-constructivist assessment process model, where the student is seen as an active agent in the feedback process, with the ability acquire standards, and to compare those standards to one's own work, and taking action to close the gap between the two (Sadler, 1989). However, and admittedly, training will be required for students to assume this role, and the curriculum must also be designed to accommodate such an experience. Also, there will be need to overcome the students' inability to trust the source of feedback, as well as the potential to despise feedback from someone they consider to be less knowledgeable compared to themselves (Evans, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This aim of this paper was to discuss the challenges that impacted on the quality of online assessment of and for student learning, vis-à-vis the need to put the student at the centre of the assessment process. While quality assurance in assessment covers a wide range of aspects such as assessment design, moderation, and feedback, we deliberately streamlined this paper to discuss the aspect of feedback and how it impacts student assessment for and of learning in an online learning environment. The findings, interventions and therefore conclusions arrived at in this paper are based mainly on our observations in the course of administering assessment to 3rd Year Physiology at the University of Namibia. We conclude that when students cheat during the course of an assessment, they are less likely to engage with feedback that is given towards that assessment. Further, a teacher's knowledge of his/her students is more likely

to help the teacher to give individualised student feedback that can go a long way into bridging the gap between current and intended learning. Lastly, we conclude that use of student agency in both assessment design and review can stand out to be the single most effective method of ensuring quality assessment with enhanced chances for lifelong learning. We part with a warning shot that agency must not be treated as an event, but rather a continuous cycle of growing and learning based on students' interests, background knowledge/experiences, and what they perceive is meaningful to them. This process is by no means immune to hurdles along the way.

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