

Literacy en mass – verifying assessment in the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign

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South Africa is now in the fifth year of the *Kha Ri Gude* adult literacy campaign which was designed to provide basic literacy and adult basic education to over four million learners. Given the scale of this initiative, which so far has recruited over two million illiterate or nearly illiterate people onto a six month programme of instruction, the issue of how learning is assessed and moreover, shown to be accurately assessed, has interesting challenges for assessment practice and quality assurance.

Kha Ri Gude is interesting both in the means used to assess and record learner progress, as well as in the methods used to moderate and verify the reliability and validity of that assessment.

Since 2008 the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has taken responsibility for verifying the assessment of the campaign learners and endorsing the award of ABET level 1 credits to the successful learners.

The paper describes *Kha Ri Gude*'s assessment processes, how the moderation is effected in an annual verification workshop and at learning sites, and notes that some of the methods used could be applied more widely to other areas of education.

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The background

The *Kha Ri Gude* literacy campaign was launched in April 2008 after a two year process of planning and development. A *Ministerial Committee on Literacy Report* of 2006 provided a recommendation and plan for such a campaign which was approved by Cabinet in November 2006. During early 2007 a *Strategic Plan, Operational Plan* and a *Rolling work programme* for the set-up period were developed and approved by Cabinet in August 2007. Though the set up period had serious bureaucratic difficulties (Aitchison, 2008), it started operations in 2008 under Chief Executive Officer, Professor Veronica McKay, and enrolled 357,195 learners.

Subsequent years have seen large enrolment numbers:

Year	Learners	Educators	Supervisors	Coordinators
2008	357 411	31 770	33 400	192
2009	619 920	34 440	3 444	185
2010	613 924	38 424	3 394	170
2011	668 924	38 636	3 619	190
	2 260 179			

Note: There are 18 learners in a class led by a volunteer educator. Supervisors look after 10 Educators and Coordinators oversee 20 Supervisors.

Each year 40 000 classes of 18 learners all languages in every part of the country deliver basic literacy and numeracy at a cost of less than R770 per learner. By international standards the campaign has an astounding retention rate with over 90% of learners submitting their final assessment at the end of the six month programme.

Such enrolment and retention numbers are impressive and suggest that South Africa could well be on the way to reducing the number of illiterate adults by 50% to meet its Education for All commitments by 2015 (Aitchison, 2010, 2012).

Management of the logistics, stipendiary payments and the learner database have been outsourced to a commercial company. Specially prepared workbooks in all South African languages as well as Braille were delivered to all the learners. The delivery infrastructure developed by the campaign has worked extremely well and is an invaluable delivery mechanism available to all government departments (currently already taken advantage of by the Expanded Public Works Programme). The stipendiary payments support nearly 40 thousand jobs per annum and bring over R450 million into poorer communities and rural areas.

The design of the campaign

The original design for the running of the campaign was not dissimilar to many other literacy campaigns where there is a central management/oversight unit which is also responsible for the development of instructional plans and materials and a cascaded training of personnel from national down to district and then to local level.

As with all such cascades the problematic elements include:

- the logistics of delivery of training and materials to the lowest level – that of the volunteer educator who teaches a group of learners
- the methods and effectiveness of the reporting back to the headquarters on the running of the classes and the assessed achievements of the learners
- the financial system for paying salaries and stipends to the personnel and volunteers at the various levels.

The campaign design owed something to the organisational model of the Venezuelan literacy campaign (which had been studied by the Ministerial Committee on Literacy) as well as to McKay's experience in running the one successful component of South Africa's previous effort at a literacy campaign, the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) (McKay, 2004, pp. 128-136; Ministerial Committee on Literacy, 2006, pp. 19-22). The proposed model was robust and scalable so that it could be relatively rapidly adjusted to the number of participants (which were somewhat reduced from the original plan because of budgetary constraints and which led to an extension of the life of the campaign beyond the originally envisaged ending in 2012).

The verification issue

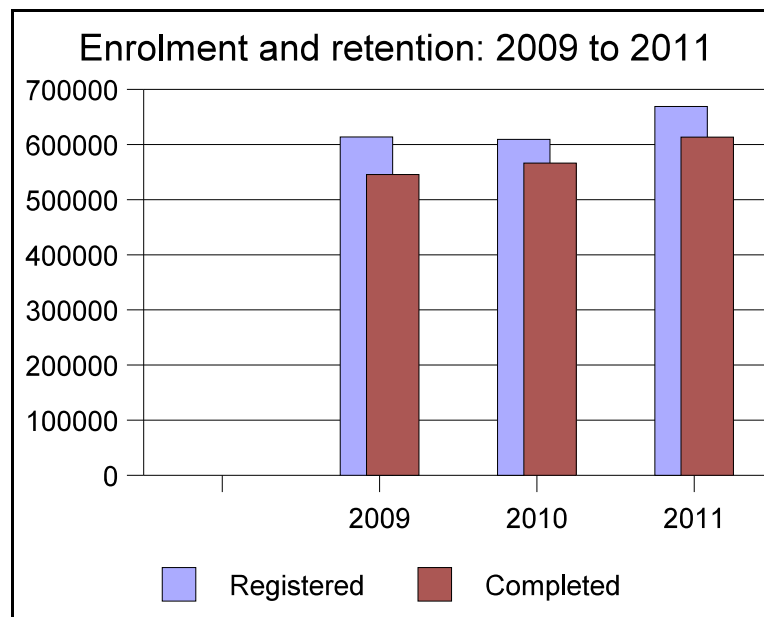
The obvious questions that then had to be asked now that the campaign was rolling ahead was "Is this all real! Are learners in classes? Are educators teaching them?" And "Is there real evidence that the participants can do basic reading, writing and counting?" Given the general dearth of reliable data on the education system in South Africa and particularly adult education, some scepticism was justified that these questions could be answered.

It also needs to be owned that there is a fairly general international scepticism about the actual learning achievements of mass literacy campaigns (it also extends to some scepticism about adult literacy work in general, where, often, if any data is available, it tends to be attendance data, not assessment results).

Kha Ri Gude reports since 2008 have indicated that the campaign has worked, and worked well for the following reasons:

- Practical scalable plan
- Good centrally designed materials
- Effective and efficient national administration (with no irregularities or corruption)
- Effective incentives to voluntary educators (if no reporting no stipend)
- High capacity to retain learners
- Participants comfortable with local delivery at sites they feel secure in
- Genuine assessment and monitoring thereof.

Completion of programme rates have been high. In the second year of the programme (2009) an amazing 89% of the learners finished the programme and submitted an assessment portfolio (some 545,666 of them), with 566,190 in 2010 and 613,275 in 2011



Was there a way to verify all this, and particularly the assessment of learning gains by people who had genuinely participated in the programme classes?

Before looking at SAQA's answer to this question, a digression is needed on *Kha Ri Gude*'s approach to assessment.

Kha Ri Gude's assessment methods

Kha Ri Gude has an innovative Learner Assessment Portfolio (LAP) that is completed by each learner, marked by the voluntary educator, and collected and stored nationally and moderated by SAQA appointed personnel after the completion of each year. On the basis of this annual moderation exercise, SAQA has declared itself confident of the general integrity of the assessment process (further confirmed in 2011 by site visits by SAQA personnel which tested learners and compared their results with the corresponding LAPs). Successful learners are credited with an ABET level 1 award which is recorded on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD).

The actual Learner Assessment Portfolio (LAP) is small A4 size booklet with, apart from some pages for biographical data, has ten language and ten numeracy activities designed to provide continuous developmental assessment during the course of the programme.

Example of two pages from a LAP

Activity 1: WRITING MY NAME

Complete these shapes till the end of the line.

Write your first name.

Write your surname.

Mark **Criteria**

5	Learner is able to form the shapes correctly. The shapes are regular. Learner is able to write his or her name and form the letters correctly. Learner has good control over the pencil.
4	Learner is able to form the shapes. They are more or less regular. Learner can form the letters of his or her name correctly. He or she holds the pencil correctly.
3	Learner cannot form regular shapes. Learner needs to practice writing his or her name. Most of the letters are correctly formed.
2	Learner has made lots of errors and does not hold the pencil correctly yet.
1	Learner was not ready to do the activity. Let learner redo the exercise at a later stage.

Activity 2: FILLING IN A FORM

Fill in your details on the form.

Name: _____

Surname: _____

ID number: _____

Date of birth: ____/____/____ Age: ____ years

Male ☐ Female ☐

Today's date: ____/____/____ Signature: _____

Total number of ticks: _____

Mark **Criteria** **Date:** _____

5	Learner correctly filled in all the information. Learner has 7-8 ticks.
4	Almost all information given is correct. Learner has 5-6 ticks.
3	Form is only partly completed. Learner has 3-4 ticks.
2	Learner made lots of errors. Learner has 0-2 ticks.
1	Learner was not ready to do the activity. Let learner redo the exercise at a later stage.

At various stages in the sixth month programme, the learner completes the appropriate activity in the LAP. The educator then marks the completed activity using a set of criteria printed in the LAP itself and gives feedback to the learner.

If the learner finishes the programme, the completed LAP is then sent to the educator's supervisor, who checks the marking and signs it off and then passes it on to the coordinator who does a similar moderation check.

The LAPs are then collected and returned to a central warehousing facility in Midrand, Gauteng and the marks (including for each item) are captured on a database. The campaign committed itself to this awesome logistical task of collecting in every completed portfolio for checking. There has never been a time in South Africa when so many assessment scripts have been collected together in one place in such numbers. It is an awesome sight.



A portion of the LAPs collected at the end of 2009

SAQA involvement in verifying the assessment

In 2009 I was fortunate enough to be commissioned by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to join a team to conduct a verification exercise on the assessment conducted by *Kha Ri Gude*, a process required by SAQA if it was to load the learners' results onto its National Learner's Records Database (NLRD).

It was recognised that conducting on-site national examinations for a six month basic literacy programme would have been a logistical and invigilation impossibility – *Kha Ri Gude* classes of 15 to 18 people take place at varying times in people's homes, in churches, community halls, spaza shops and even at taxi stops.

For the first 2008 cohort, SAQA was able to undertake a process in which the course materials and portfolio documents were checked for their alignment with ABET Level 1 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the first three levels of UNESCO's Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP). A further review of the curriculum and materials was conducted in 2012 (Adler, Aitchison and French, 2012, pp. 79- 92).

In each of the years 2009 to 2012 there was a two and a half day moderation workshop in which a three person SAQA appointed team of specialists (the senior verifiers) oversaw about 200 moderators and 20 verifiers who checked a large sample of the LAPs submitted at the end of the previous year (that is for the 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 cohorts of learners).



Moderators check LAPs from the 2010 cohort

The moderators, guided by verifiers appointed for each language, examined substantial samples of the portfolios that reflected the distribution of languages and provinces. LAPs from at least one educator from a group of ten under a supervisor was included in the sample, and thus also from every coordinator. The final sample moderated was larger than required for statistical reliability. Special attention was taken to identify signs of possible irregularities and only a small percentage (ranging from 5% to 3% over the four years) of the sample exhibited any.

Overall the marking was judged to be excellent or acceptable in 87 to 80% of the cases and that there was no need to adjust the marks upwards or downward. A comparison of the marks from different years (marks for the whole LAP, the communication and numeracy components, and for each question), indicate a high degree of congruency.

A new way of ‘moderating’

Conventionally, moderators (or external examiners) re-mark a percentage of scripts (usually 10% or less) and, should they find a **general** trend for the original marks to be too high or too low, a statistical adjustment is made to all the candidates marks. [This process has to be distinguished from the various forms of statistical adjustment made in large examination systems, such as that for the National Senior Certificate, where marks may (post any moderation) be adjusted to conform to previously established norms.]

The *Kha Ri Gude* verification, though it also encompassed traditional moderation, focussed on a different target – the marker, not the learner.

All the assessment in *Kha Ri Gude* is site based. The assessment via the Learner Assessment Portfolio (LAP) is overseen by the educator in charge of the class and is marked by the educator. There are large variations in how the classes are run, the style of instruction, and in the timing and way in which the various portfolio activities (the assessment items) are handled. Although the outcomes being assessed are very basic and the criteria given to the educators straightforward, too much variation in the marking was considered a real possibility, particularly as many of the educators had fairly minimal training as literacy instructors.

The SAQA verification process therefore focussed initially on the marking. The ‘moderators’ were asked to moderate the marking. This of course required something of a mind shift from looking at what the learner got right or right to what the marker got right or wrong. Some counter intuitive judgements have to be made, for example that a learner who got a very low mark may indeed have been marked in an excellent way or that a learner who got a very high mark may have been badly marked.

Another rationale for focussing on the marking is that the learners, once they have completed the programme, are gone for good. The markers remain – and improving their marking of the next cohort of learners is a high priority.

The 'marking the markers' criteria and results

A simple four category set of ratings was devised for the moderators to implement and these are the findings from the first four years of moderation workshops:

Summary of quality of marking ratings by year					
Code	Description of rating	Cohort Year			
		2008	2009	2010	2011
E =	Excellent well judged accurate assessment	57%	28%	16%	21%
A =	Acceptable. There are differences between the mark given and the moderator's judgement on what should have been given, but this difference is not serious enough to question the credibility of the overall result of the marking.	30%	58%	74%	69%
E + A		87%	86%	90%	90%
I =	Inaccurate and/or inconsistent judgement.	7%	10%	7%	6%
P =	Problematic. Extremely questionable judgement by marker that indicates either very poor marking or the ignoring of problems or of possible indications of dishonest practice.	5%	4%	3%	3%
I + P		13%	14%	10%	9%

What is interesting about this data series is that it shows both the general stability in the moderators' judgement that only about 3% to 5% of the marking was seriously problematic.

There is evidence of a growing rigour among the markers in their differentiation between excellent marking and simply acceptable marking (the percentage described as excellent marking dropped from 57% in 2008 to 28% in 2009 and down to 16% in 2010 and 21% in 2011). This can be ascribed partly to the training related to the marking of the LAPs given by *Kha Ri Gude* and partly to the influence of the SAQA verification workshops themselves.

The conventional moderation

A more conventional moderation exercise was done at the same time that looked at the actual learner marks using a very simple set of categories, namely:

Same	Mark given is accurate and fair
Up	Mark is too low (the mark should be put up higher)
Down	Mark is too high (the mark should be brought down lower)

Generally the rating of the level of the learner's performance was similar across the four years:

Summary of fairness and accuracy of the mark ratings					
Code	Description of rating	Year			
		2008	2009	2010	2011
S	Mark given is accurate and fair	87%	87%	91%	91%
U	Mark is too low (the mark should be put up higher)	6%	4%	2%	2%
D	Mark is too high (the mark should be brought down lower)	7%	8%	7%	6%

The moderators believed that for most (87% to 91%) of the portfolios the marks given were an accurate reflection of the quality of the learning demonstrated and could remain unchanged. Their opinions were somewhat divided on the remaining 8% to 13% of the portfolios where they disagreed with the marks – some should be brought down, some raised. Of these disputed marks there is a tendency to want the marks lowered (6% to 8%) versus 2% to 6% raised).

The further check of site visit tests

As a further form of verification of the authenticity of the assessment results, in November 2011 pilot site visits were conducted at a sample of 177 physical sites with overall attendance by learners from about 300 classes. At each site the SAQA visitors asked the learners present to complete a small set of assessment exercises (very similar in content and difficulty to some of those in the Learner Assessment Portfolio).

Each set of assessment exercises was enclosed in a folder which recorded details of the site and the visitors' observations on the class.

The purpose of gathering this data through this verification activity was to **compare** the results of this brief set of assessment exercises with the results of the Learner Assessment Portfolios (LAPs) completed by learners during the programme.

When the completed LAPs were submitted at the end of the programme an attempt was made to match the completed site visit assessment sheets from each site with the corresponding pack of submitted LAPs from that class. The result was that some 1,558 site record sheets were each linked to the corresponding completed (or partially completed) LAP.

The scores for the site visit assessment exercises and the equivalent LAP activities were broadly comparable.

The maximum total score for the five Site visit exercises (excluding a reading aloud test) was 31, for the more or less five equivalent LAP activities 28. The means and standard deviations are as follows:

	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Site activities	26.6188	5.64971	1 558
LAP activities	25.3357	2.84805	1 558

The means are comparable (allowing for the somewhat higher scores on the LAPs)

The patterns of scores in the individual items was also broadly congruent.

Though the pilot site visits were to a relatively small sample they do suggest the general authenticity of the assessment results in the LAPs.

Some conclusions

What SAQA's verification of the Kha Ri Gude assessment process has demonstrated is that good control of assessment can be achieved even under the most difficult conditions and that good data can be generated from a South African educational initiative. *Kha Ri Gude's* assessment achievement is part of a broader achievement by a campaign that has received very little publicity or public acclaim, all the more remarkable given the dearth of good news about South Africa's education system.

Kha Ri Gude has managed to register over 2 240 000 adult learners since 2008, with over 80% completing the 6-month courses, has delivered comprehensive, professional and attractive published curriculum materials to every learner – workbooks and portfolio books in all eleven official languages and Braille, as well as educators' guides. It has engineered an extremely efficient logistics system which

annually distributes over 660 000 sets of materials to all corners of the country, tracks enrolments and collects and manages the return of over 600 000 portfolios, while managing the registration and payment (mainly small stipends) of close to 40 000 educators in decidedly non-formal contexts (homes, garages, churches, community halls). It cascades delivery effectively through a successful hierarchy made up of voluntary educators (responsible for the recruitment and teaching of at least 18 learners each year), assisted by local supervisors under the guidance of district coordinators, who report to national management housed in the Department of Basic Education. Finally, it has used an official moderation and verification approach linking the programme to the quality demands of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) allowing successful learners to be recorded on the National Learner Record Database (NLRD)

The particular way in which *Kha Ri Gude* has managed its assessment and the moderation and verification thereof is elegantly straightforward and might be considered for other initiatives as well as for primary schooling., particularly in those grades where there are no external examinations.

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