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Bridging the Gap: Student perceptions of Academic Literacy at Boston Media House.

By Thamashni Bux

Abstract

In South African Higher Education, the consensus is that students' abilities to write clear and coherent English are diminishing. The emergence of private higher education colleges offering smaller classes, specialised tuition and individual attention aspires to bridge the gap between the poor schooling system in South Africa and a demanding tertiary education system. Many colleges and universities offer courses or modules that deal with academic literacies and improving the English writing skills of students. Boston Media House offers Academic Literacy 1 to first-year media students to help transition students from a basic understanding of education expectations to a more context-specific academic discourse. However, students perform poorly in Academic Literacy and cannot assimilate the knowledge processes and practices to navigate their higher education qualifications successfully. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of the Academic Literacy 1 course at BMH. The findings of the research will be used to inform future decisions in designing an Academic Literacy 1 curriculum that is fit-for-purpose and addresses the challenges faced by BMH students. The study found that students find the course useful in terms of academic referencing techniques and avoiding plagiarism; and improving basic English language skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. No other topic areas of the course had any impact on the students, nor were they seen as relevant to their studies or to the world-of-work. The study further revealed that the institution's media-specific contextualization of the subject is not evident in the students' experience or engagement. Therefore, it is necessary for the course to be revised and areas of concern addressed. This would allow the institution to align the outcomes of the course with the teaching and learning practices to achieve the objectives of the curriculum i.e., inducting students into a range of media-related fields and improving academic writing skills.

Keywords:
Academic Literacy; Higher Education; Boston Media House