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Identification and classification of incoming learning behaviours amongst a sample of first year, English second language, engineering students : A case study

Simelane, Zanele Faith

2008-10-21T10:21:43Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/5775

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ABSTRACT

This research identifies and classifies incoming learning behaviours found amongst a sample of English second language first year engineering students. During the research process, it was discovered that students entering university for an engineering/science based degree tend to struggle with the English lecture style and the pace of work at a first year level due to their having been taught in their mother tongue or through the use of code switching in their school years. It was further identified that the students who took part in the sample were highly reliant on notes and lecturers for 'obtaining knowledge' that could be utilized in the answering of problems. The findings indicate that English second language students who had been taught in Black schools had a limited view of knowledge that was dependant on received knowledge. It was further found that with the exception of students who had been taught in English only schools, there appeared little correlation between the matriculation aggregates of the students and their first year engineering marks. Where English second language first year engineering students exhibited some learning behaviours that suggest an aptitude for success in higher education, the findings suggest that the students who took part in the study do not feel supported at university. The findings, while complicated in nature, also suggest that university structures and procedures are not responsive to the specific needs of the sample group. It is the recommendation of this study that further research be undertaken amongst a larger sample group if curricular changes amongst first year engineering courses are to be considered.

KEY WORDS

English second language students, engineering, first year, learning behaviours, language