

Stakeholder Perspectives on the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) for contributing to the development of graduateness: Case Studies of the University of South Africa (UNISA) & Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)

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Disclaimer:

- This presentation does not present formal statements nor official strategies from the two South African Higher Education institutions mentioned herein, but builds on my research and experiences conducted as both an (exiting) staff member at Unisa (between 2011 and May, 2014), and academic and employment aims as an incoming staff member at NMMU as of 1 June 2014.
- As the project initially intended to focus on Unisa as its sole site, career developments as of end of March 2014 now see the expansion of both the research concept, as well as a reformulation of aims and outcomes presented for the first time in this document.
- This material is subject to much future development, and it is hoped the GO-GN network may influence where and how it moves ahead.
- For this reason, the name of the two contributing supervisors / promoters have been omitted, for now.

The PhD concept - In Context:

Educator/ youth developer at tertiary level for 12 years

BA (Anthro/Soc), Hons (Media Studies/ Journalism),
2005 - MA in Cultural Studies: research focussing on youth
perspectives of negotiating shifting cultural identities in the New
South Africa

Also - Role in new Extended Foundation Degree Programmes
(EFDPs), set as dual faculty Programme Coordinator and multiple
subject lecturer at University of the Western Cape from 2004 –
2009 (Arts and Law Faculties)

EFDPs = Extensive student and programme assessment, facilitating
enhanced learner support amidst rigorous evaluations: passion for
learner support/ learning support

Far too often, then:

I experienced the discriminating/ harmful reality where students who were largely unable to effectively represent their learnings, insights, thoughts, knowledge, histories, and career ideals (amongst others), mostly due to what I identified as inabilities/limitations within the national medium of tertiary instruction in South Africa: English.

Far too often, still:

Access is **not** everything in developing language abilities, as very often, students I encounter are unable to effectively utilise the resources. This is true even when provided institutional access to electronic resources. This is (at times) due to a shortage of awareness and insight, a limited understanding, or no know-how about using these effectively.

The PhD in Context (cont.):

Literacy is a **national** challenge in South Africa.

This challenge is also experienced continentally (in Africa), and beyond.

It is especially pertinent in English Second Language situations

IN SA: High percentages of incoming students do not have the requisite skills to successfully navigate their academic journey at tertiary level.

There are 11 official languages in SA, and more spoken still.

Attrition rates are high (drop-outs and stop-outs).

± 1 in 3 complete first year.

Reality of several barriers (financial, access, social responsibility, lack of support, self-doubt, etc) to completing tertiary studies: many simply never complete their degree

The PhD in Context (cont.):

Relocation to Johannesburg 2010-

Academic facilitator at University of South Africa in 2011- currently.

Role: Create material resources (original and sourced), share relevant developmental facilities and provide support through workshops and face-to-face consultations for student learner support

Mission: raise student throughput rates and enhance graduate employability through writing interventions, from undergrad entrants to exiting final year students

However, in 2013/ 2014:

Learner support at Unisa is diffused.

Resources and service providers are not interconnected many times:
(administrative/ academic/ learner support units are separate): not integrated

Formal institutional learner support resources are accessed by only a small percentage of students (reasons include location, awareness, stigma, etc.)

Registered PhD mid-2013 to examine/ map and hopefully mitigate some of these challenges, pursuing work-role functions and feeding the PhD in another way.

Now what?

In June 2014, a career relocation to the Eastern Cape-based Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth, joining the Centre for Technology and Learning Management (CTLTM)

This presents several challenges to the first iteration of this PhD intention as presented at the GO-GN 1st Seminar in Cape Town 2013, first set at Unisa, but now offering an opportunity to examine the SA literacy challenge in another identifiable crisis area, NMMU

Keywords and Abbreviations:

Keywords

- Graduateness
- Graduate Attributes
- Literacy / Metaliteracy
- Open Educational Resources (OER)
- Digital Citizen
- Nation building
- Learner Support
- Open Distance Learning (ODL)

- **Abbreviations**

- | | |
|--------|--|
| • SAQA | - South African Qualifications Authority |
| • HESA | - Higher Education South Africa |
| • NSC | - National Senior Certificate |
| • NDP | - National Development Plan |

“... an **OER** is simply an educational resource that incorporates a licence that facilitates reuse, and potentially adaptation, without first requesting permission from the copyright holder.”

A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources (OER). (2011) Prepared by Neil Butcher for the Commonwealth of Learning & UNESCO. Edited by Asha Kanwar (COL) and Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic (UNESCO).

Basic definitions, to enhance basic understanding:

- Significant limitations of having to translate home-language thoughts/ concepts/ ideas/ etc. into English at every turn.
- The lexicon in a home language allows 'blue' to be expressed across several shades in the language (azure, sky, teal, etc)
- The translation limitation obscured the richness of expression and analysis many times.
- Challenges of representing types of thought within **both** academic and career environments
- “Raise your language” – research and researcher slogan, also my practitioner’s practical facilitation approach
- Tools include digital, print, broadcast media like talk radio, discussion forums, institutional sites, etc

Graduateness:

At Unisa: a definition of graduateness is included within the approved Unisa Curriculum Policy (2011)

“Apart from degree-specific knowledge and technical skills, [students] are able to demonstrate a set of generic transferable metaskills and personal attributes which are generally regarded as indicators of their employability and work readiness” (Coetzee, 2012).

Professor Narend Baijnath (Pro-Vice Chancellor, Unisa) says graduateness is “what it means to be a higher education graduate” (Griesel and Parker 2009).

Understanding Graduateness:

Unisa's Melinda Coetzee (2012):

Exploring Distance Learning Students' Graduateness in Relation to their Employability

Sets forth 8 “core skills and attributes” (2012:306)

TABLE 1. COETZEE'S 8 CHARACTERISTICS OF GRADUATENESS (2012)	
1. Interactive Skills	2. Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Skills
3. Continuous Learning Orientation	4. Enterprising Skills
5. Presenting and Applying Information Skills	6. Goal Directed Behaviour
7. Ethical and Responsible Behaviour	8. Analytical Thinking Skills

Expanding Coetzee's Graduateness:

Interactive Skills:

These skills relate to: (1) **the effective and efficient use of English language and technology when communicating with others** and (2) the ability to function effectively and efficiently as a person in communicating and interacting with people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and authority levels.

Problem-solving and Decision-making Skills:

These skills relate to being creative and proactive in the process of producing a solution to a recognised often ill-defined problem or problematic complex situation.

Continuous Learning Orientation:

This involves having a cognitive openness toward lifelong learning and the willingness to proactively engage in the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities throughout one's life and career in reaction to, and in anticipation of, changing technology and performance criteria.

Enterprising Skills:

These skills involve being venturesome and applying critical thinking, initiative and proactivity when engaging in economic activities or undertakings either to create and operate an enterprise of one's own, or be a substantial contributor to an enterprise as an employee. Being enterprising also means that one is able to recognise and be adept at dealing with organisational or team politics.

Graduateness:

Presenting and Applying Information Skills:

These skills refer to the ability to clearly and convincingly communicate knowledge, facts, ideas, and opinions (oral and written) with the view to offer solutions for one's personal benefit, or for the benefit of one's community or workplace.

Goal-Directed Behaviour:

This refers to the ability to be proactive and apply initiative to achieve one's goals, accomplish tasks, or meet deadlines. Setting realistic goals, developing plans and taking action to achieve one's goals, accomplish tasks and meeting deadlines are core elements of goal-directed behaviour.

Ethical and Responsible Behaviour:

This involves accepting full responsibility for, and taking the lead in upholding the code of moral beliefs and values of one's profession, community, and/or workplace in all one does.

Analytical Thinking Skills:

Analytical thinking implies being skillful in employing logical reasoning and analysis in explaining information and data, and drawing insightful conclusions from the data analysis."

Graduateness may further be categorised into:

Graduate Attributes

- citizenship (social contributors)
- employability (work readiness)

Graduate Skills

- hard (subject-specific, specialised)
- soft (ability to do something based more on attitude and behaviours, generic, transferrable, key)

(Glover, 2002)

This research project seeks to focus primarily on developing English language competencies (as the medium of instruction in SA) amongst an undergraduate cohort.

It is perhaps just one (amidst several other) strategies which has potential to support both institutional and student input towards both essential skill and attribute development, and thus aims to enhance abilities across academic and career environments

Graduate Skills

“the skills agenda”

(Candy and Crebert, 1991)

The distance (or gaps) between where some institutions do little (or nothing) and others invest significant efforts to develop academic offerings in line with workplace demands or realities.

***Critical thinkers vs Labour skill demands?**

What is digital literacy?

PhD perspective/ approach

*"... an **entitlement** for students that **supports** their
full participation in a society in which
social,
cultural,
political and
financial life
are increasingly mediated by digital technologies..."*

(California Technology Assistance Project)

Levasseur, A.(October, 2011). Learning in a digital age: Teaching a Different Kind of Literacy.

<http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2011/10/learning-in-a-digital-age-teaching-a-different-kind-of-literacy277.html>

Digital Literacy

“the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers”

(Gilster, 1997:1)

“the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process”

(Martin 2005:135)

Transliteracy

“the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and films, to digital social networks”

(Thomas, et al., 2007)

Metaliteracy

“an overarching, self-referential and comprehensive framework that informs other literacy types”
(Mackey and Jacobson, 2011:70)

being metaliterate (or information literate) means being media, digital, ICT and visual literate, with the ability to appropriately collaborate with others

Repurpose User Behaviour?

“The challenge for information literacy instruction is to develop information skills in learners who may already consider themselves effective internet users.

An effective way to do this is to use familiar technologies with structured, collaborative and experiential activities” (Jones, 2007:2)

The examination of student and educator awareness (and their understanding) of terminologies used to describe, use & adopt OER and related practices forms part of the initial investigation.

Open Distance Learning (ODL)

students do not have a residential or terrestrially-based learning experience

study via correspondence (the use of snail-mail still forms a large component in the communication chain)

Learner support traditionally been located at the institution's Regional Service Centres (RSCs)

Open Distance eLearning (ODeL)

the prioritisation of ICTs in the DL chain as medium of engagement, interaction and engagement

Learner support is now placed online

increasingly elevate *the potential* of OER at Unisa

The concepts above are pertinent still, but even in 2014, learner support is hardly online, and yet this ideal is ever present and shared to students in 2013

ODL/ ODeL

Digital Native
or
Digital Migrant



Image: G Fransman 2011

Learner

Before:

Face to face

vs

Online

2014 and

ahead:

Face to face

online or

Online

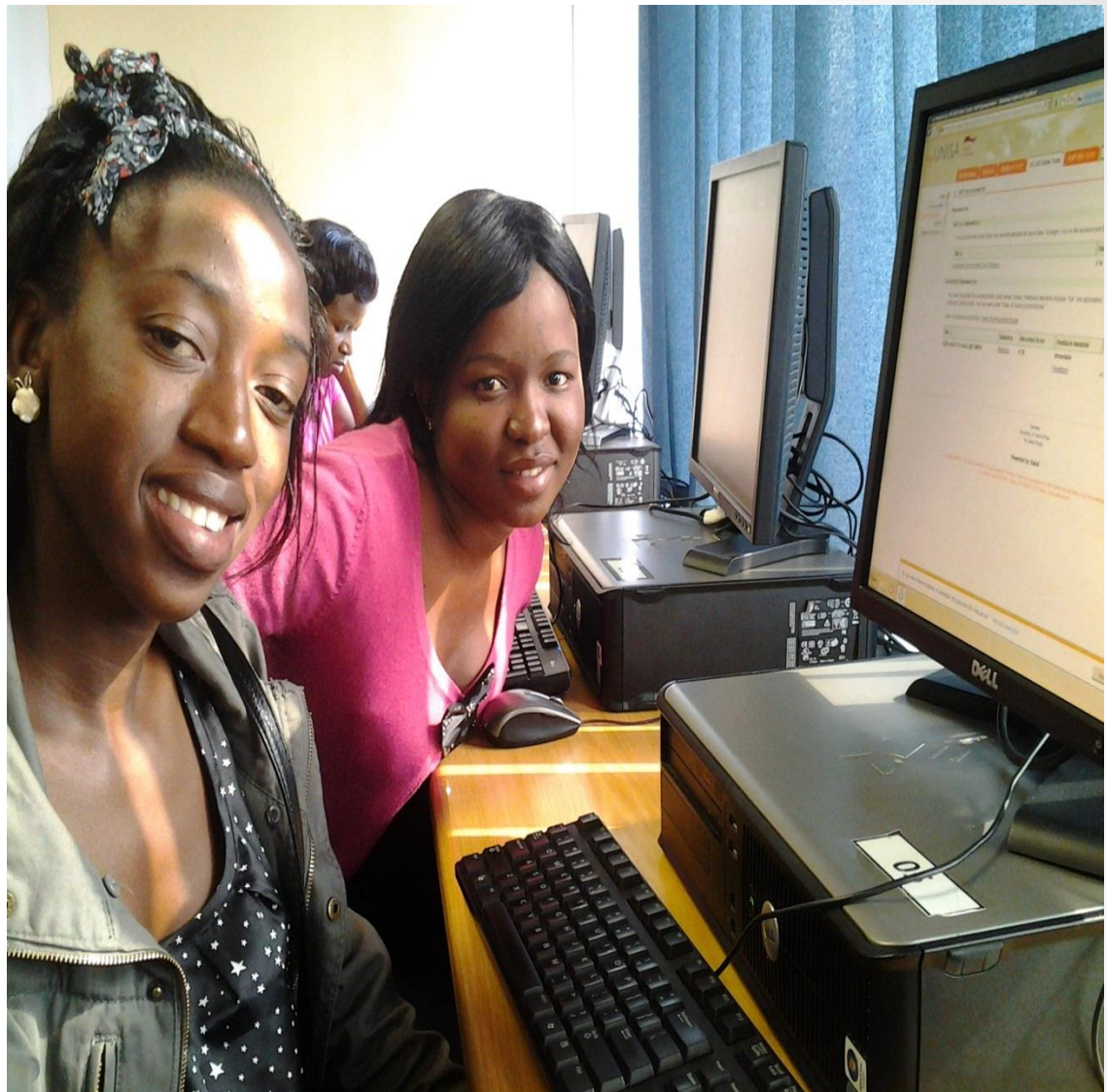


Image: G Fransman 2012

Writing Support Intervention: JHB RSC (in current work role)

- Target group: ENN (access degrees) and ENG I 1st Year Students (+8,000 students nationally across access programmes)
- SMS Notification sent to JHB RSC registered (+3000) ENN and ENG 1st Year students to attend a writing support workshop, focussing on Essay Writing/ Academic Writing and Structuring.
- Two sessions set up (3 hours each), on the 8th August 2013, Jhb RSC
- Students were requested to book (online/ telephonically/ sign-up) in order to signal attendance and enable material/ venue preparation.
- **Few** actually booked using manual sign-up or telephone.
- **None** booked electronically.

The result?

8 Aug 2013, Unisa JHB RSC
Workshop duration: 3 hours

Session 1 (9am): 88 attendees (picture)

Session 2 (1pm): 189 attendees



Image: G Fransman 2013

This image reflects the daily reality experienced at Unisa Regional Service Centres (RSCs), where ODL/ ODeL students (still) come for academic **and** administrative support

The aims of the 2013 JHB RSC intervention project component (1):

1. to provide Academic Literacy student support/ language assistance for ENN and ENG 1st year learners, provided in the form of 2 workshops, held on 8 August 2013
2. to offer support for a specifically 1st year essay writing task (Task 1 in 2 respective tutorial guides); ie. Support was essay structure and planning based, not content based

The aims of the JHB RSC research project, continued (2):

3. Administer a print survey focused upon ratings of pre and post-intervention perceptions of aspects of student gradueness and awareness of learner support resources
4. to introduce participants to Open Educational & eResources as widely available, quality, and free learner support resources for academic purposes

Who are we speaking about? Which languages do they speak?

Home language (N = 157)

The highest proportions of students were IsiZulu 1st language speakers.

Only 7 said English.

149 students indicated a spread across 12 other languages spoken, and almost all indicated English within their additional language options. Where exactly English fell as a reported 2nd/ 3rd/ etc language was NOT measured, but it was observed that it generally was **not** the 2nd language reported in many respondent lists, many of which often had up to 5 languages identified.

Number	Frequency	% of cases	Rank
IsiZulu	47	29.9%	1
Xitsonga	29	18.5%	2
Sesotho	16	10.2%	3
Other	15	9.6%	4
IsiXhosa	12	7.6%	5
Setswana	10	6.4%	6
Tshivenda	8	5.1%	7
English	7	4.5%	8
Sepedi	7	4.5%	8
Siswati	4	2.5%	10
IsiNdebele	4	2.5%	11
Afrikaans	2	1.3%	12

In terms of conducting research on the internet, the ability reported was 41.9% before the support, which increased to 62.2% after the support.

Limitation acknowledgement: self-reporting presents questions about reliability and validity, but here serve as initial indicators to build upon in further research).

The post-intervention reports of ‘understanding’ where to find language support resources online increased from 21.7% to 67.3%.

Statement	Group	Level of Excellence					Sample Size
		Very Bad	Bad	So-so	Good	Very Good	
Conducting research on the internet	Pre	12.8% (20)	15.4% (24)	30.1% (47)	26.3% (41)	15.4% (24)	157
	Post	5.1% (8)	9.0% (14)	23.7% (37)	37.8% (59)	24.4% (38)	156
Understanding of where to find language support resources online	Pre	16.0% (25)	28.8% (45)	33.3% (52)	17.9% (28)	3.8% (6)	156
	Post	3.2% (5)	8.3% (13)	21.2% (33)	39.7% (62)	27.6% (43)	156

Initial Findings/ Informing PhD Research:

Who are we speaking about?

Did Unisa students know about OER at all?

- Before the 2013 interventions, only 14.7% of the students who responded reported having **any** knowledge of Open Educational Resources (OER)... “What?” they asked.
- Student awareness of ever finding OER: 13.6%
(amongst those who knew of it)

Initial Findings

Informing PhD Research:

Significant problems/ challenges of getting students to adopt digital technologies for academic support (classroom experiences)

- Using online booking resources to assist training and planning seems beyond large numbers of attendees, who simply opt out: **ICT Training Interventions/ Basic Computer Training** (after all workshop attendees were urged to attend, HIGH volumes did, evidenced via extremely positive reports from labs and students: attendance up 250% in JHB RSC)
- The cost-benefit analysis made by the student is often skewed (they consider money invested in going online vs actual benefit)
- Too trusting of material quality: the assumption that prescribed materials provided 'in-module' constitute the scope of learning required to 'pass' that subject, therefor not necessitating further use or accessing of support or further learning materials

Who are we speaking about?

Student self-report on their English language abilities (2013)

Rate of excellence on aspects used when conducting research on a 5 point Likert scale
1 -5 rating scale 1 = very bad, 5 = very good

(total survey sample = 237)

My English is

Pre-test aspect ratings (mostly Good as positive):

- My English reading (79.3% Good or Very Good)
- My understanding of English (52.6% Good or Very Good)
- My English writing (51% Good or Very Good)

However after the support given, the post ratings increase in all aspects examined (mostly very good as positive):

In terms of the post ratings, aspects with over 50 % were

- My English reading (86.6% Good or Very Good)*
- My understanding of English (75.0% Good or Very Good)
- My English writing (74.2% Good or Very Good)

Initial Findings/ Informing Research:

Significant problems/ challenges of getting students to adopt digital technologies for academic support (classroom experiences)

**Students often did not know what good support resources would look like,
where to access **good** resources or support,
or even what was available to use for their development and support
(whether inside the institution or as available externally)**

This intervention was repeated on 19 March 2014

- 62 students elected to attend repeat across 3 weeks of structured interventions (daily 3 times per week), focussing on academic writing and career preparation/ development. A much larger cohort attended many, but not all.
- Here, participants were introduced to Open Education Resources as well as Open CourseWare (OCW) for learner and professional support
- It is essential to note that amongst this group, several were so impressed initially by their introduction to OER and OCW as support materials that they even took leave in order to attend and maximise their exposure to what was, for all intents and purposes, a new concept to most of them.

2 lessons learnt during this period 2014

- (i) There is still a vast unawareness and lack of understanding of what open educational resources are, and how these resources may assist students with self and institutional development strategies across academic and career activities, and
- (ii) once introduced to the existence and purpose of open educational resources, a hunger for more was immediately apparent, and regularly reported throughout the support period and sessions (all **facilitated without** a computer in the venues)

March 2014, Group 1



Image: G Fransman 2014

Group 1 and 2 post-intervention: OCW happy



Images: G Fransman 2014



Thank you to OCWConsortium
for providing post-intervention surprise token
gifts to pass to attendees)

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the potential of an using English language-based Open Educational Resources (OER) toolkit to contribute to developing gradueness amongst undergraduate students at the University of South Africa (Unisa) and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)?

Research sub- questions

- What current language development/ language support OER are used in particular disciplinary contexts, by which stakeholders are they used, and for what purpose/s?
- What are the perceptions of these stakeholders (students and educators) regarding the potential, challenges and impact of using English language-based OER tools?
- What steps are needed to realise the potential of English language-based OER in assisting with student success and gradueness, but also to address the presenting educator challenges and concerns regarding OER?

PhD RESEARCH AIMS:

- Develop a conceptual framework for graduate literacy in the context of an open distance learning context at Unisa
- Map the current production, use and effectiveness of English language-based OER at Unisa and NMMU
- Map selected stakeholder perspectives and awareness on the production, use and effectiveness of English language-based OER
- Analyse and evaluate the Unisa and NMMU policy frameworks in creating an enabling environment for the production and effective integrated use of OER for graduate development
- Develop a practical ePortfolio toolkit and related framework for the use and production of OER in developing and contributing to student gradueness

Research Design:

2 X case study approach:

located within Unisa (ODL/ ODeL institution) and at NMMU (residential based)

Sample:

Undergraduate students (considering limiting the dual institutions samples to education students only at Unisa and NMMU)

Staff (academic & support)

Sample selection from within percentile groups of English matriculation results, or from students who failed (or are failing) English access modules

Literature Review:

Currently:

Reconfiguring this component to include/ capitalise on recent career developments end March 2014. Previous iteration focussed heavily on ODL environment.

Must additionally focus upon:

- * Mapping the state of remedial English strategies, programmes and structures at Unisa and NMMU
- * Examining a number of strategies to address the presenting lack of proficiency in English – whether in-course support, provided as voluntary support programmes, amongst compulsory courses in English proficiency (as pre-requisite for enrolment or as part of formal degree structures), and especially those available as OER resources

Methodology:

- Desktop Research/ Document Surveys
- Investigative Surveys & Individual Interviews (online and/or face-to-face)
- Print/ Online and Workshop-based research associated with support interventions
- Develop a remedial digital tool, toolkit, basket of tools based on literature review and first rounds of interviews and surveys
- Expose participants to the tools (institutional platforms preferred, to assess access to the data, review how many times participants have accessed the resources, downloaded them, done the self-assessment exercises, time spent on-task, etc.
- Compare participant exam/ assessment results (in English modules) against non-participating cohort of same levels
- Interview participating students
- Refine tools
- Make recommendations

Reformulating the research aim:

- to explore how digital, voluntary (and/or compulsory) curricula e-resources and OER can address the English proficiency of students in a South African HE context, while positively contributing to the development of graduateness

Final comments

- Unisa intended to fully shut down the face-to-face Academic Literacy component at the end of 2013
- The unit relocated to another Directorate, and took on a different operational model (prioritising online)
- The resulting indecision about addressing the challenges have brought several issues to the forefront in 2014, many relating to transitioning across a divide of skills, awareness and abilities
- After experiences and research conducted at Unisa JHB between 2011 and 2014, these suggest there is a vast (and at times personally overwhelming) transitional challenge experienced due to students' current digital (dis)abilities and language challenges
- One strategy is to actively use OER more explicitly in all aspects of the learner support cycle

- The challenge **remains** how to support crossing the knowledge and skills divide, while best supporting this transition **without** the face-to-face assistance
- One of the PhD challenges is also to move students across the crippling hurdle of academic and digital skills shortages, which present widely across Unisa's 450,000 composite student profile, and is prevalent in the national school-leaving cohort
- This challenge is equally present at NMMU, and the investigation of strategies to mitigate these is the next focus in redeveloping and finalising this proposal ahead of the toolkit creation

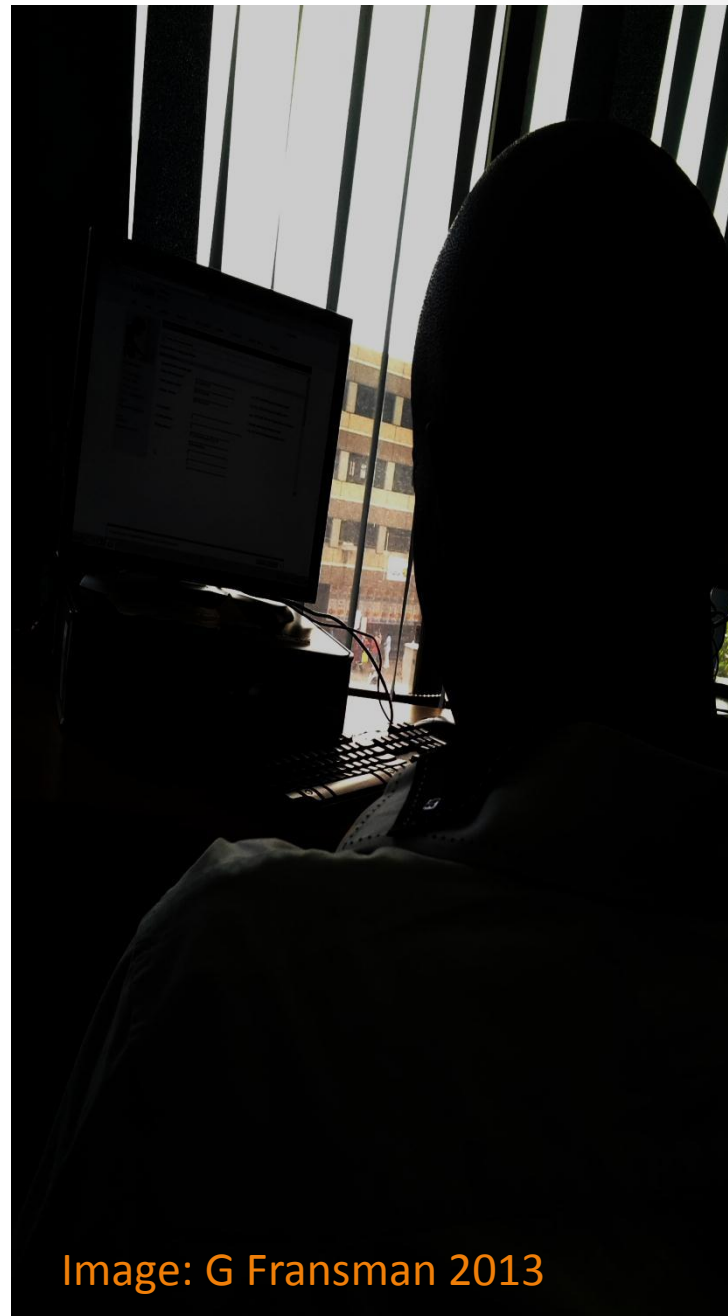


Image: G Fransman 2013

Thank You



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