

RETHINKING THE MODERATION OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

A conceptual analysis of the moderation of assessment exposed different and contested theoretical understandings and practical applications of the phenomenon in an international context. International literature also reveals that there is very strong support for a moderation system of continuous, social and consensus seeking moderation involving communities of moderation practice. In turn, a subsequent comparative document analysis of relevant South African national policy and guideline documents show that these documents might encourage institutional moderation systems that are relatively quantitative, structured, individualised, analytical and/or technical in nature. The implication is that South African higher education authorities and institutions such as universities of technology need to review and rethink their moderation of assessment policies and procedures.

Keywords: Higher education; university; assessment; student; moderation; policy; quality; conceptual analysis; document analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Tight (2012: 74-75), contemporary assessment practices in higher education are problematic and summative assessment practices in higher education are even reported to be in disarray. As a result, assessment criteria, standards, policy and practices are growing areas of research in higher education. Tight (2012: 108) also indicates that research concerning quality in higher education includes analysis and critique of quality assurance systems imposed by governments. A common theme in these studies is that quality systems in different countries are not as successful as envisaged (see Lodge & Bonsanquet 2014: 17). Black, Harrison, Hodgen, Marshall and Serret (2011: 458, 461), Bloxham, Hudson, den Outer and Price (2015b: 7-9), and Shapland and Nulty (2012: 831) further report the existence of inconsistent moderation practices and judgements among academics participating in research projects.

Bloxham, den Outer, Hudson and Price (2015a: 1), Sadler (2005: 175-176, 179) and Tight (2012: 11) confirm that, in general, there is no common interpretation, understanding and/or categorisation of assessment criteria and assessment standards and that this leads to marked variations in assessment and moderation processes.

Such differences inevitably make the moderation-of-assessment task problematic and point to the need for frequent review of moderation processes (Ewens, Andrews & Scott 2014: 2). Black et al. (2011: 458, 461), Ewens et al. (2014: 6) and Tight (2012: 108), however, warn that one should expect sensitivity to and resistance against change from academics. This implies that academics should be involved in such processes.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

During a process of intensive reading of the relatively meagre amount of available research and literature on moderation of assessment as a quality assurance mechanism (Bloxham 2009: 212; Bloxham et al. 2015a: 2; Bloxham, Hughes & Adie 2015c: 2; Kuzich, Groves, O'Hare & Pelliccione 2010: 2; Nuttal 2007: 126), I learnt that scholars and practitioners of assessment and moderation differ considerably as far as their epistemological foundation for assessment and moderation practices are concerned. This inevitably leads to marked variations and inconsistencies, bureaucratic implementation, conceptual confusions and even false assumptions about student assessment and moderation (Adie, Lloyd & Beutel 2013: 969; Bamber 2015: 474; Bloxham 2009: 209-220; Bloxham et al. 2015a: 8-12; Bloxham et al. 2015b: 3; Bloxham et al. 2015c: 10; Elton 2002: 7; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2010: 122; Sadler 2005: 175-176, 186, 189, 193; Sadler 2012: 1; Smith 2009: 2-5; Stowell 2004: 507-508). The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training of the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (RSA, DHET 2013: 72), confirms this problem in the South African higher education context by stating that "it is increasingly clear that quality assurance [...] systems can tend towards bureaucratic implementation which eliminates professional judgement".

Having been a university teacher for more than two decades and an assessor trainer for ten years, I have extensive experience in both assessment and moderation but have always experienced moderation of student assessment somewhat negatively, whether as assessor, or as internal or external moderator. I accept the need for moderation of my own assessment practices as a quality assurance requirement that, in turn, implies that I also have to be accountable for my own assessment actions (cf. Adie et al. 2013: 975; Blom 2008: 288; Bloxham 2009: 213-214; Nuttal 2007: 117, 125; Pope et al. 2009: 780). Despite the relative low remuneration usually associated with external moderation, I do it willingly because I view it as a good opportunity to learn from and network with others in my field and thus enhance my professional development (cf. Hays & Bashford 2009: 162; Hannan & Silver 2006: 62-65). Nevertheless, I have not yet been convinced that the moderation practices, in which I have been involved, eventually have been effective and have produced the outcomes that international literature and national policies and guideline documents on assessment and moderation claim they should do.



In light of this discovery, I am convinced that there is an urgent need to review and rethink moderation of assessment as it is currently applied by universities in the South African context. The aim of this paper therefore is to provide an evidence-based rationale for the reviewing and rethinking of policies and procedures for the moderation of assessment in South African universities and ultimately to trigger a national debate in this regard.

3. METHODOLOGY

Tight (2012: 183-185; 189-190), who is an expert on research in higher education, indicates that literature reviews and documentary and conceptual analyses are popular qualitative research methodologies in the field of higher education. As variants of documentary analyses, conceptual analyses are characterised by a great degree of theorisation, take a philosophical approach, and are concerned with ideas and contested meanings as well as the political implications of contestations over the diversity of conceptual meanings. A conceptual analysis in higher education research is often international in scope and makes use of research and policy literature of a range of developed nations rather than only one idealised system.

In line with Tight's above-mentioned guidance regarding research methodologies in higher education, the research methodology for this investigation firstly involved a conceptual analysis and interpretation of the moderation of assessment as reported in international literature as well as all concepts related to the assessment of moderation. Emphasis was on different and contested theoretical understandings and practical applications of the phenomenon in an international context.

The conceptual analysis subsequently was followed by a comparative document analysis of South African legislature and national policy and guideline documents that relate to moderation of assessment in higher education. Besides an interpretation of relevant legislation and the resulting regulatory frameworks and systems for the moderation of assessment in South African higher education, the document analysis in particular aimed at identifying and interpreting the terminology used in relevant policy and guideline documents of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA 2001), and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC 2004a; 2004b; 2008). The terminology used in these documents was compared with the terminology that surfaced in the preceding conceptual analysis. This process enabled me to identify and interpret the nature of moderation of assessment systems that might emerge in response to South African legislation and policy.

4. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework for this investigation is based on an analysis and interpretation of different concepts related to quality inputs, processes and outputs of assessment and moderation systems, different interpretations of the concept of moderation and the terminology mostly associated with different types of moderation system.

In a conference paper by Ewens et al. (2014: 2, 4-6) and a related journal article by the same authors (Scott, Ewens & Andrews 2013: 27-28), they describe moderation as a cyclical process which should include moderation activities before (i.e. quality assurance in the design of assessments), during (i.e. quality assurance during the implementation of assessment) and after assessment (i.e. quality control of marking and grading), as well as a process of review, report and change, based on the moderation results. In this context, quality is a very important component of the moderation of assessment.

4.1 Quality-related concepts

Quality-related management processes and systems in education have actually been borrowed from business and industry. In this context, "quality" is the extent to which a degree of excellence is achieved. For the purpose of quality improvement and quality enhancement, such quality first should be agreed upon among different stakeholders; then specified, measured and monitored in order to result in appropriate decision-making in a (total) quality management system (Blom 2008: 288, 292; Tight 2012: 210).

Quality management refers to a combination of processes (e.g. quality assurance, audit, control and review) used to ensure that the agreed-upon quality (i.e. the degree of excellence) is being achieved (Blom 2008: 288; Tight 2012: 210). In the context of student assessment, such quality is usually specified in terms of fitness for purpose, principles of good assessment (e.g. equity, validity, reliability, consistency, fairness, comparability, credibility, integrity, etc.), assessment criteria and/or assessment standards (Bird & Yucel 2010: 1; Black et al. 2011: 452; Blom 2008: 288-289; Darling-Hammond 2010: 3; Ewens et al. 2014: 15; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2010: 121; Sadler 2005: 175-176, 188, 193; Smith & Clayton 2011: 1; Tight 2012: 111; Wren 2010: 133; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski 2008: 10).

Quality assurance refers to the activities (i.e. the inputs and processes) that are planned and implemented to assure the quality of products and services (i.e. the outputs) (Blom 2008: 288; Harlen 1994: 8-9; SAQA 2001: 70; Maxwell 2006: 3). Maxwell (2006: 3) indicates that quality control involves the verification of procedures (i.e. processes) and judgements made of students' assessment tasks (i.e. outputs).

In turn, Blom (2008: 288) defines quality audit as activities undertaken to measure the quality of products and services (i.e. outputs) that have already been delivered (i.e. by means of inputs and processes).

One therefore may conclude that quality control and quality audit are related activities and refer to the evaluation of assessment processes and outputs during and after assessment. Nevertheless, both Blom (2008: 301) and Maxwell (2006: 3) confirm that moderation of assessment is usually only associated with an evaluation of the outputs of teaching, learning and assessment. Since outputs are only as good as the inputs and processes, however, moderation of assessment rather should be integrated into a quality management cycle and involve input, process and output (Blom 2008: 301-302; Bloxham et al. 2015c: 2, 11).

Maxwell (2006: 3) refers to quality review as the final component in the quality management cycle, which involves a retrospective analysis of information obtained during the quality assurance, control and audit processes in order to decide on possible remedial actions for quality enhancement or improvement.

4.2 Moderation as a quality audit and control process

According to Sadler (2012: 1), “[...] the verb 'to moderate' dates from about 1400; originally meant to regulate or abate excessiveness, to smooth out extremes”. In this context, some authors view moderation as an audit and control process. It occurs after summative assessment in order to ensure that assessment grades awarded are fair and reliable, that marking criteria have been applied consistently and that the assessment outcomes (i.e. students' marks) are subsequently adjusted by means of statistical modification (Harlen 1994: 8; Nuttal 2007: 118). This interpretation of the term moderation emphasises that assessors should be held accountable and that moderation is a quality audit and control process of ensuring consistency and comparability of assessment judgements (Brown 2010: 5).

Moderation practices that relate to this view of moderation usually involve the moderation of representative samples of students' summative assessment tasks. It means that students' assessment tasks are actually marked for a second time by another assessor or moderator. International literature on moderation of assessment refers to such practices as sample marking or second marking (Bloxham 2009: 212-213; Bloxham 2015c: 6-10, 9; Garry, McCool & O'Neill 2005: 192-193; Murdoch & Grobbelaar 2004: 120; Nuttal 2007: 119; Smith 2009: 2). Garry et al. (2005:191-193; also see Bloxham et al. 2015c: 7), however, report that research has shown that double-blind marking of assessments is more objective and reliable than second marking. As a second marker, the moderator is aware of and influenced by the mark awarded and comments made by the assessor.

This leads to smaller differences in moderator and assessor marks if compared with marks awarded through double-blind marking. This phenomenon is referred to as the 'anchoring and adjustment' hypothesis.

4.3 Moderation as a social process of consensus seeking

In contrast to the interpretation of moderation as a quality audit and control process, other authors prefer to interpret moderation as a social process of consensus seeking about quality in teaching, learning and assessment and, in particular, assessment criteria and assessment standards. This interpretation includes a variety of related perspectives that are elucidated in the subsections to follow.

4.3.1 Moderation as calibration

Sadler (2012: 1, 2, 9-10, 13-14) lobbies for the replacement of the term 'moderation' with the term 'calibration'. In line with the original meaning of the term moderation as referred to in 4.2 (i.e. to regulate/abate/smooth out), Sadler uses the metaphor of the tuning in or calibration of machines. He argues that teachers should rather gradually be 'tuned in' in order for them to become capable of making 'calibrated' judgements of students' work. Through this process university teachers will become 'connoisseurs' and 'calibrated academics' who are able to make valid professional judgements.

4.3.2 Continuous, social consensus seeking in the teaching-learning situation

In the context of moderation as a process of consensus seeking, authors view moderation as a continuous, social practice of consensus seeking by groups of assessors who start this process from well before teaching, learning and assessment commence and which continues until after final assessment has taken place. Most of the elements of the latter interpretation of moderation feature in at least 19 of the international literature sources I consulted (see table 1).



Table 1: International authors who support the view of moderation as a continuous, social practice of consensus seeking

<i>Author(s), date and page number(s)</i>	<i>Author(s), date and page number(s)</i>
Adie <i>et al.</i> 2013: 971, 975	Ewens <i>et al.</i> 2014: 2, 4
Bird & Yucel 2010: 1-2	Garry <i>et al.</i> 2005: 197
Black <i>et al.</i> 2011: 452, 459	Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2010: 114, 116, 120-121
Blom 2008: 304, 310	Kuzich <i>et al.</i> 2010: 1, 3, 4, 7-8
Bloxham 2009: 210, 212	Maxwell 2006: 9
Bloxham <i>et al.</i> 2015a: 14	Orr 2007: 64
Bloxham <i>et al.</i> 2015b: 3-4, 10-12	Sadler 2012: 2-3; 6-7; 10
Bloxham <i>et al.</i> 2015c: 8, 11-13	Shapland & Nulty 2012: 831
Brown 2010: 1, 5	Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski 2008: 3
Dill 2014: 56	

The authors listed in table 1 support, although it might be indirectly, the perspective that moderation of assessment is more than the mere evaluation of the quality and validity of summative assessment tasks and the consistency and reliability of the subsequent marking process. They believe that moderation of assessment should be embedded in the entire teaching, learning and assessment process, aimed at improving student learning and leading towards a shared understanding of assessment criteria, standards and student achievement by means of a consensus process of mutual assistance and confirmation.

4.3.3 Communities of moderation practice

Moderation as a social process of consensus seeking and calibration is often linked with communities of professional practice. Wenger (2000: 229) assigns a combination of three elements to communities of practice, which he refers to as a “joint enterprise”, “mutuality” and a “shared enterprise”.

Most of the international literature sources listed in table 1 also refer to groups of assessors and moderators as either “communities of moderation practice” or “assessor partnerships” (Adie *et al.* 2013: 975; Bloxham 2009: 210, 218; Bloxham 2015c: 8, 11-12; Dill 2014: 55-56; Elton 2002: 13-14; Ewens *et al.* 2014: 2-3; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2010: 115; Kuzich *et al.* 2010: 4; Maxwell 2006: 9; Orr 2007: 647; Smith 2009: 4-5). Proponents of this approach argue that it should be more effective than traditional quality audit and control approaches to moderation. Most of them also claim that assessors and moderators’ perceptions of quality, assessment criteria and standards depend on their professional knowledge, experience, personal values and social-cultural frameworks (Bird & Yucel 2010: 1-2; Bloxham *et al.* 2015b: 3). Thus, teacher expertise is important for the planning and implementation of good assessment procedures and for making good judgements through applying relevant performance standards (Maxwell 2006: 1-2).

In terms of Wenger's (2000: 229) version of a community of practice, proponents of this approach support moderation as social consensus seeking through the collaboration (i.e. "a joint enterprise") and mutual engagement (i.e. "mutuality") of university teachers in order to establish a shared understanding (i.e. a "shared repertoire") of assessment criteria and standards. They emphasise that assessment is unavoidably subjective in nature (and the members of the community thus 'inter-subjective'), that there is a need for a collegial discourse (Ryan 2015: 3) and appropriate professional development of teachers as assessors and moderators. This might include professional assessor and moderator training and accreditation (Harlen 2011: 69).

However, many of these proponents rather view the prolonged exposure of experienced and novice teachers to communities of moderation practice as a professional learning opportunity that might even make assessor and moderator training redundant. Prolonged social consensus seeking is expected to deliver competent assessors and moderators who continuously share, discuss and negotiate the interpretation of assessment criteria and assessment standards and learn from each other in the process (Bloxham et al. 2015c: 13; Darling-Hammond 2010: 2; Ewens et al. 2014: 2; Harlen 2011: 68; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2010: 112, 127; Tight 2012: 111).

4.4 Contrasting assumptions, discourses, theoretical preferences and underlying paradigms

The conceptual analysis repeatedly points to two contrasting extremes of moderation of assessment perspectives and systems. Stowell (2004: 495-510) indeed distinguishes between contrasting 'technicist' and 'professional expert' approaches to defining academic standards.

A qualitative interview survey by Adie et al. (2013: 972-974) among academic teachers revealed the existence of four separate discourses of moderation, namely moderation as equity, justification, community building and accountability respectively. Bloxham et al. (2015c: 4-5) and Stowell (2004: 495-510) refer to these as important principles underpinning decision-making in the assessment process. In this regard, one might conclude that emphasis on justification and accountability indicates an inclination towards a quality audit and control approach, whereas emphasis on equity, justification and community indicates an inclination towards a social consensus seeking approach.

The literature consulted also typifies scholars and practitioners who favour and/or use technical terminology and quality management procedures such as structure, measurement, score, objectivity, concurrence, accountability and quality control in their discourse of moderation of assessment as positivist, structuralist, technicist and/or technical-rationalist (Adie et al. 2013: 970, 975; Bloxham 2009: 210; Orr 2007: 646-647; Stowell 2004: 500, 505-506).



In contrast, approaches that favour moderation as a social practice of consensus seeking through communities of moderation practice are typified in the international literature as post-structuralist, interpretivist and/or social constructivist (Adie et al. 2013: 970-971, 975; Bloxham 2009: 210, 218; Brown 2010: 1, 5; Elton 2002: 13-14; Garry et al. 2005: 197; Orr 2007: 645-648; Sadler 2012: 1-3, 6-7, 10, 13-14; Smith 2009: 4-5). Scholars and proponents who favour a social practice of consensus seeking mainly embrace terminology, concepts and quality procedures such as community building, inter-subjectivity, professional judgement, connoisseurship, consensus and calibration in their discourse on moderation,

In conclusion, therefore, it is clear that assessment and moderation might be interpreted, defined and implemented in different ways and with emphasis being placed on different characteristics and processes. The specific interpretation and application applied depend on the person's or the group's socio-cultural context, epistemological assumptions, theoretical preferences, discourses and underlying paradigm (Bloxham et al. 2015b: 3-4; Brown 2010: 5; Kuzich et al. 2010: 3; Nuttal 2007: 118; Sadler 2012: 1; Tight 2012: 111).

4.5 A continuum of types of moderation systems

Although international scholars such as Maxwell (2006: 4-5) mainly distinguish between two extreme and contrasting types of moderation systems that differ in style and complexity (i.e. the audit and control vs. the social consensus seeking type), they also acknowledge that there might be moderation systems and processes that cannot be typified as identical to any one of these extreme examples. Bearing in mind the complexity of moderation as exposed in the conceptual analysis reported, I strongly agree that this would be a gross oversimplification.

Moderation systems are unavoidably context-specific and will rarely show all the characteristics of any of the two opposite extremes. For this reason, I suggest that moderation systems should rather be considered and evaluated on a continuum of moderation systems with the two extreme exemplars of moderation systems serving as the extreme and opposite poles of the continuum.

4.6 Terminology associated with the two contrasting types of moderation

For the purpose of the envisaged comparative analysis of relevant South African policy and guideline documents, it was necessary to identify the most important terminology associated with each of the two identified extreme types of moderation.

A content analysis of the literature sources revealed the terminology (representing concepts, principles, activities and procedures) that is mostly associated with each of the two contrasting types of moderation systems as shown in table 2. The identification of these two sets of terminology eventually enabled me to analyse and typify the nature of moderation systems that might be implied and/or encouraged by South African national policy and guideline documents for the moderation of assessment (see 5.1).

Table 2: Terminology mostly associated with the two contrasting types of moderation

<i>Terminology mostly associated with audit and control moderation systems</i>		<i>Terminology mostly associated with social consensus seeking moderation systems</i>	
Audit	Moderation	Calibration	Mutual confirmation
Accountability	Monitor	Co-constructing	Mutuality
Accuracy	Objectivity	Collaboration	Negotiation
Alignment	Positivist	Community building	Post-structuralist
Analytic	Quantitative	Community of practice	Professional expertise
Concurrence	Random sampling	Connoisseurs	Professional judgement
Consistent marking	Rational(-ist)	Consensus	Shared understanding
Control	Reliability	Continuous	Social constructivist
Credibility	Representative sample	Discussion	Social moderation
Explicitness	Sample marking	Embedded	Social process
Judgement	Standard(-isation)	Formative assessment	(Inter-) subjectivity
Justify	Statistical manipulation	Equity	
Mark(-ing)	Structure/Structuralist	Holistic criteria	
Mark modification	Technical	Integration	
Measure	Validity	Interpretive	

Sources consulted: Adie et al. 2013: 971, 975; Bird and Yucel 2010: 1-2; Black et al. 2011: 452; Bloxham 2009: 210, 218; Bloxham et al. 2015a: 12-15; Bloxham et al. 2015b: 2-12; Bloxham et al. 2015c: 2-12; Brown 2010: 1, 5; Darling-Hammond 2010: 3; Dill 2014: 54-56; Elton 2002: 13-14; Garry et al. 2005: 197; Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith 2010: 112, 115-116, 120-121; Kuzich et al. 2010: 1-4; Maxwell 2006: 1-10; Orr 2007: 646-647; Sadler 2012: 2-3, 6-7, 10; Shapland and Nulty 2012: 831; Smith 2009: 4-5; Wyatt-Smith and Klenowski 2008: 10.

5. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

This section outlines my analysis of South African legislation and national policy and guideline documents that relate to the moderation of student assessment in higher education.

The analysis in the first place focused on an interpretation of relevant legislation and the resulting regulatory frameworks and systems for the moderation of assessment in South African higher education (see 5.1). Secondly, it focused on the identification of the terminology used in policy and guideline documents of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA 2001), the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC 2004a; 2004b; 2008) and the comparison of this terminology with the terminology mostly associated with the two major categories of moderation type portrayed in table 2 (see 5.2).

5.1 South African legislation and national regulatory frameworks for the moderation of assessment in higher education

Moderation of assessment in South African higher education is governed by two acts, namely the South African National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 (as amended in 2010; see RSA 2010) and the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (as repeatedly amended from 1999 to 2012; see RSA 2012). In line with these acts and amendments, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the CHE's Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) are collectively responsible for ensuring quality education and training in South African higher education and training (HET). SAQA is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation, and the eventual registration of unit standards and qualifications on the outcomes-based South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (SAQA 2001: 6).

As the quality council (QC) for HET, the CHE is responsible, *inter alia*, for developing and implementing a system of quality assurance for higher education, including programme accreditation, institutional audits, quality promotion, capacity development, standards development and the implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). As the quality committee of the CHE, the HEQC has a delegated mandate to perform the quality assurance and quality promotion functions of the CHE in terms of the mentioned acts and the HEQC founding document (CHE 2004). This entails promoting quality awareness, responsiveness and assurance among constituent providers in higher education.

Since its inception, SAQA (2001: 59-60) has devolved assessment of learning to the providers of education and training, and subsequently constituted a layered system for the moderation of assessment as a quality assurance mechanism for qualifications and programmes registered on the NQF (Murdoch & Grobbelaar 2004: 116). In accordance with the mentioned legislation and regulations, the HEQC (2008: 1-2) has subsequently delegated the training and development of assessors as well as the moderation of assessment, as two quality management functions, to higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves.

Whereas the HEQC remains accountable to government and SAQA for ensuring quality education and training, HEIs in turn are accountable to the HEQC for these delegated functions (HEQC 2008: 4; Ndebele & Maphosa 2013: 155).

5.2 A comparative analysis of relevant South African policy and guideline documents

As indicated, the comparative document analysis involved the identification, interpretation and/or comparison of criteria and terminology in the relevant SAQA (2001) and the HEQC (2004a; 2004b; 2008) policy and guideline documents. The terminology mostly associated with the two major categories of moderation types are portrayed in table 2.

The delegation of the quality functions to South African HEIs reported in 5.1 presupposes that each HEI has an overall assessment policy which governs assessment practices and related moderation procedures (HEQC 2004a: 12; 2008: 7; Ndebele & Maphosa 2013: 155). In addition, these practices and procedures should comply with a number of criteria that stipulate minimum requirements to be met by the HEIs (HEQC 2004a: 19-20; 2004b: 127-128; 2008: 9-11; Ndebele & Maphosa 2013: 156-157). Among others, these requirements include the external examination or moderation of student assessment in modules/courses at qualification exit levels by independent experts from other HEIs, as well as the internal moderation of assessment in all courses/modules, especially those that are not externally moderated (HEQC 2004a: 19-20; 2004b: 127-128; 2008:9-11).

Whereas the first four subsections below contain an analysis, interpretation and comparison of four of the above-mentioned criteria, section 5.2.5 reports on the findings of a content analysis of the terminology used in the above-mentioned policy and guideline documents.

5.2.1 Professional development of assessors and moderators

Although the relevant policy and guideline documents confirm that quality assessment training for university teachers is compulsory in South Africa (HEQC 2004a: 9, 10, 12; 2004b: 78; 2008: 9), it need not be formal and accredited. Contrary to requirements for assessors in other sub-frameworks of the NQF, the HEQC does not subscribe to the notion of accrediting and registering university teachers on a national database as competent assessors (Ndebele & Maphosa 2013: 156).

However, university teachers in South Africa, as academics who are highly educated within a variety of academic disciplines, are not necessarily education experts since they are not required to obtain a professional education qualification.



Some university teachers are either not sufficiently trained as assessors and moderators, or have not yet undergone such training. This might jeopardise these teachers' ability to effectively make professional judgements pertaining to student learning and performance, as required if a social consensus seeking approach is applied (see 4.3.2). No mention is made in the analysed documents of alternative professional development opportunities for assessors and moderators such as associated with social, consensus-seeking communities of moderation practice (see 4.3.3).

5.2.2 Alignment as a criterion

The minimum requirements that are reported in the four policy and guideline documents for the above-mentioned assessment and moderation of assessment practices refer to the need for aligning both learning activities and the required assessment performances with the learning outcomes at programme and module/course level (HEQC 2004a: 20; 2008: 11). This clearly relates to Biggs's (1996) constructive alignment, which is a logical systematic process and might therefore be labelled by some as a structured, technicist approach.

5.2.3 A continuous internal process of monitoring assessment processes

One of the policy documents analysed refers to the need for a continuous internal process of monitoring assessment processes (HEQC 2008: 10). Although this might be interpreted as to relate to a continuous internal process of social consensus seeking, as reported in 4.3, the simultaneous reference to monitoring might as well be interpreted as a process of quality audit and control, as reported in 4.2.

5.2.4 Representative sample marking

The four analysed documents all refer to the need to moderate the marking of representative samples of summative assessment tasks and borderline cases. This requires second marking which, according to the literature reported in 4.2, is associated with a quality audit and control approach to moderation and is criticised for being less objective and reliable than double-blind marking.

5.2.5 Other criteria for and terminology related to assessment and moderation

The different criteria for student assessment and moderation that are either prescribed or recommended in the four relevant documents (cf. HEQC 2004a: 19-20; 2004b: 127-128, 130-131; 2008: 9-10; SAQA 2001: 60-61), are listed in the first (i.e. left-hand side) column of table 3. The terminology already highlighted in 5.2.1 to 5.2.4 above appears in the second column.

A content analysis of the four documents (HEQC 2004a: 19-20; 2004b: 127-131; 2008: 9-11; SAQA 2001: 1-20, 59-68), aimed at the identification of terminology used in the policy and guideline documents, revealed the additional terminology that is also listed in the second column in table 2.

Table 3 also shows which of the identified criteria and concepts listed in the two left-hand side columns relate to each of the two contrasting moderation approaches, namely the quality audit and control (see column 3) and the social consensus seeking (see column 4) approaches respectively.

The terminology listed in the two right-hand side columns indeed appears in table 2 as well (see 4.6). From table 2 it then becomes clear that the South African policy and guideline documents make significantly more use of terminology associated with a quality audit and control approach to moderation (17 terms) than terminology that is associated with the social consensus seeking approach (only four terms).

Table 3: Criteria and related terminology featuring in the analysed policy and guideline documents

<i>Criteria mentioned in policy and guidelines</i>	<i>Additional terminology identified in policy and guidelines</i>	<i>Correspondence with terminology related to a quality audit and control approach</i>	<i>Correspondence with terminology related to a social consensus seeking approach</i>
Accuracy	Appropriateness	Accuracy	Concurrence (cf. of mutual confirmation)
Consistency	Alignment	Alignment	Continuous process
Credibility	Assessor training	Assessor training	Fairness
Explicitness	Commensurateness	Commensurateness (cf. statistical manipulation)	Integration
Fairness	Concurrence	Concurrence	
Integrity	Continuous process	Consistency	
Quality assurance	Effectiveness	Credibility	
Relevance	Integrated assessment	Explicitness	
Reliability	Marking	Marking	
Rigour	Maximising	Measure	
Security	Measuring	Moderator training	
Transparency	Moderator training	Monitoring	
Validity	Monitoring	Random	
Verification	Random checks	Reliability	
	Recording	Representative sample	
	Representative sample	Standard	
	Security	Validity	
	Standard		

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The conceptual and documentary analyses of international literature and relevant South African policy, procedure and guideline documents, clearly point to the fact that these policy and guideline documents make ample use of terminology that relates to institutional moderation systems that focus on quality audit and control. The terminology used in these documents rarely relates to social consensus seeking moderation systems (see 5.2.5). I therefore suspect that most South African universities, in their interpretation of these national policy and guideline documents, might opt for a system that leans towards the quality audit and control extreme of the continuum of moderation systems I proposed in 4.5.

Despite the above-mentioned conclusion, I am, however, also of the opinion that these policy and guideline documents, despite the terminology used, do not at all prohibit universities, faculties and academic departments from adopting a social consensus seeking approach in their moderation of assessment systems. Moreover, the strong support in the international literature for the establishment of communities of moderation practice that continuously seek a shared, professional understanding of and consensus about assessment practices, criteria and standards, in itself is enough reason for universities, faculties and academic departments to review and rethink their moderation of assessment systems.

In view of my own negative experiences with the superficial internal and external moderation of student assessment (as variants of the quality audit and control approach; see 2), I strongly believe that the social consensus seeking moderation approach reported in this paper might be a workable alternative for these conventional practices. The advantages of the alternative approach clearly overshadow its two disadvantages, namely that it might require more resources and time and that its impact on student learning has not yet been sufficiently researched (Bloxham 2009: 212; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2010: 116, 121; Kuzich et al. 2010: 3; Scott et al. 2013: 25). In my view, these two disadvantages are not insurmountable.

The major implication of the above-mentioned conclusions is that higher education authorities such as the DHET, SAQA, CHE, HEQC, relevant professional bodies and especially HEIs such as universities of technology need to urgently review and rethink their moderation of assessment policies and guidelines. It is, however, important to include academics in these processes (see 1).

In addition, there is an urgent need for further research into the moderation of assessment in the South African higher education context. A good starting point would be an investigation into different institutional policies and procedures for moderation of assessment and quality enhancement, as well as the impact that social consensus seeking moderation has on student learning.

In view of the relatively moderate number of research reports on the moderation of assessment found in the literature (see 2), and especially in South Africa, I trust that this paper may serve as a catalyst for rigorous further research and a new debate about the moderation and quality enhancement of assessment in South African universities and other public and private HEIs.

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