Chapter 1
Strengthening Academic Learner Support at the University of Botswana: A Situational Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a situational analysis of academic language and learning (ALL) support at the University of Botswana (UB) with the view to assess how the university is doing in this regard and the implications for student retention and success. Strategies for enhancing academic literacy and learner support are discussed based on current issues related to changing student profiles in the international higher education (HE) arena facilitated by globalization and technology. The national context of Botswana, as well as UB, will be discussed in this chapter. The need for ALL in HEIs will also be discussed and recommendations made to the UB on how to best structure their support services. Finally, an academic literacy model for the UB geared at equipping students with requisite skills for academic excellence will be proposed.
INTRODUCTION

Across the world, academic language and learning support (ALL) is considered important for academic success of students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Yet, there is no consensus about what ALL entails in the extant knowledge and this has made it difficult for HEIs to measure the contribution of ALL on student achievement looking at the changing tertiary landscape. The UB espouses ‘to be a leading center of academic excellence in Africa and the world’ (UB Vision, p. 4) thus making academic success its aspiration. Consequently, UB has put into place the ALL structure which has evolved overtime to its current format. The ALL provisions at UB, however, have not been reviewed to assess their utility and fit-for-purpose. This chapter provides a situational analysis of ALL at UB tracing its origins and its relationship to the Botswana National Language Policy and Education System. The objectives of this chapter include, but are not limited to:

- providing a situational analysis of ALL support at UB;
- evaluating the utility of UB ALL structure in meeting needs of diverse student populations;
- identifying gaps in the UB ALL support system; and
- proposing an inclusive ALL model for UB.

BACKGROUND

Botswana—formerly known as Bechuanaland Protectorate—was a colony of the British Empire until 1966 when it gained independence. As a result of its colonial past, Botswana is an Anglophone country and uses the language in all official forums. English is also the language of instruction in all academic HEIs in the country. The language was awarded the status of the official language thus relegate local languages to second class standing.

Positioning English Language in Botswana’s Education System

The high regard for English language emanates from the country’s historical background. This perception of English continued after independence as reflected in the Report of the National Commission on Education (NCE, 1977) dubbed Education for Kagisano and the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE, 1994) respectively. The policies emphasized the importance of English proficiency leading to the review of the Botswana education system to indicate this change. The reviews
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