

**TOWARDS HARMONISATION: A COMPARISON OF ASSESSMENT
STANDARDS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EXAMINATIONS IN
SELECTED SOUTHERN AFRICAN EXAMINATION BOARDS**

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**Collaboration for Harmonisation of Educational Assessment
Standards**

by

Jabulani Pato

Lindiwe Sibandze and Siphewe Sibiya



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Introduction

- ❑ In a pursuit of educational equity and regional integration, the harmonisation of assessment standards across Africa has emerged as a critical objective.
- ❑ The Association for Educational Assessment in Africa (AEAA) envisions harmonising educational assessment across the continent. This promotes cooperation among examining and assessment bodies in Africa.
- ❑ The SADC Protocol on Education and Training (2006), also aims to promote and coordinate comparable and appropriate policies, strategies, and systems of education and training among Member States.
- ❑ The relaxation of immigration formalities for students and staff within the SADC region further necessitate harmonised assessment standards to facilitate seamless academic mobility.
- ❑ UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) highlights the urgent need to preserve, revitalize, and promote Indigenous languages. Our efforts in comparing the examination standards (in readiness for harmonization) directly support this global initiative.



Introduction cont..

- ❑ Before suggesting the harmonisation of the indigenous languages examination standards in Southern Africa region (and in Africa as a whole), it is necessary that one consider what is happening on the ground (comparing the high-stake indigenous languages examination standards in selected Examination Boards).



Problem Statement

- ❑ Despite the Association of Educational Assessment in Africa's (AEAA) vision to harmonise educational assessments across the continent, high-stakes examination standards in indigenous languages remain different among Southern African countries.
- ❑ Each examination board employs its own standards, leading to inconsistencies in the assessment of language skills and cultural content.
- ❑ This lack of harmonised standards undermines the comparability and credibility of qualifications across borders.
- ❑ The absence of unified standards for assessing indigenous languages poses a significant barrier to regional cooperation and educational equity.
- ❑ Therefore, this study investigates the current assessment practices of indigenous languages in selected Southern African countries, aiming to identify commonalities, benefits of standardization, and ideal criteria that could serve as a foundation for harmonised regional assessment standards.



Aim and Significance of the Study

- ❑ The study aimed at assessing the current standards of high-stake indigenous language examinations across selected Southern African countries with the goal of identifying similarities, differences and gaps in assessment standards.
- ❑ This assessment sought to lay the groundwork for the harmonisation of educational assessment standards in indigenous languages in the region and eventually the whole of Africa.



Aim and Significance of the Study

- ❑ This would promote regional cooperation and ensure that the same standard is used in all examination boards across the region which will lead to the same qualification in all examination boards.



Research Questions

- ☐ What language areas / skills are currently assessed by the different examination boards?
- ☐ What are the benefits of having the same assessments standards in indigenous languages examinations across Southern Africa region?
- ☐ What are the ideal standards for assessing indigenous languages that could serve as a foundation for regional harmonisation?



Literature Review

❑ **The literature review of this study addressed the following subtopics:**

- Harmonisation
- Assessment Standards
- High-Stakes
- Language Proficiency
- Language Skills
- Why teach language?
- Types of language learning syllabi
- What makes a good assessment?
- Benefits of harmonised assessment standards for indigenous languages



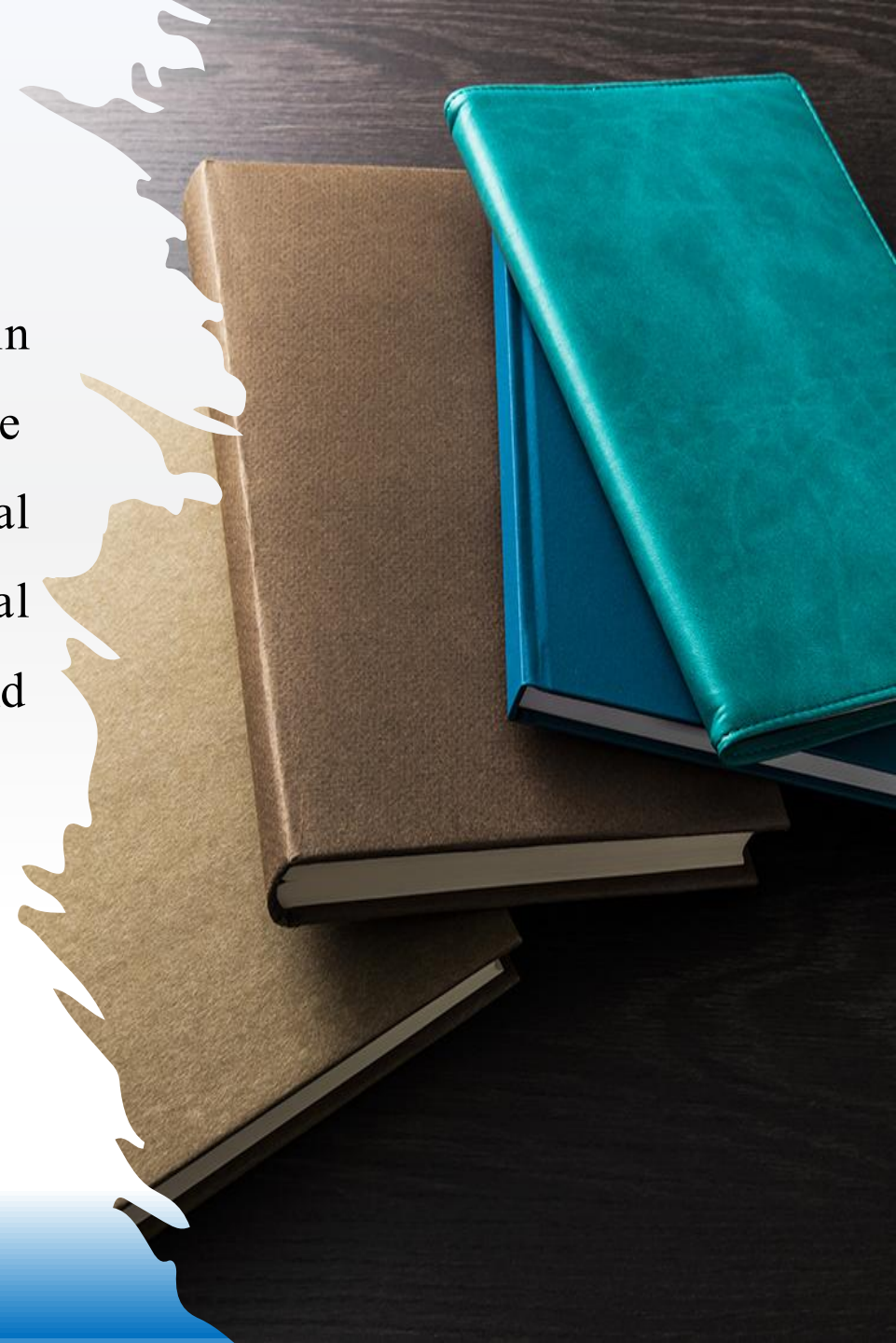
Literature Review

- ❑ Cox, Molone & Winke (2018) present a brief research from Georgetown University which explores how language learning standards have shaped curriculum and assessment practices over the past four decades. The research underscores the importance of aligning assessments with national standards, the use of performance-based and alternative assessments. It also emphasizes on the tools like the ACTFL AAPPL and SOPA for assessing oral proficiency.
- ❑ First and foremost, there is the K-12 framework. K-12 stands for kindergarten to 12th Grade, and this is generally the entire span of primary and secondary education in many countries (Diaz-Rico and Weed, 1995). Then, K-12 in language assessment refers to language learning and evaluation from early childhood through high school. It also refers to standards and assessments that are age-appropriate, developmentally aligned, and often nationally or regionally standardized (Cox, Molone & Winke, 2018).



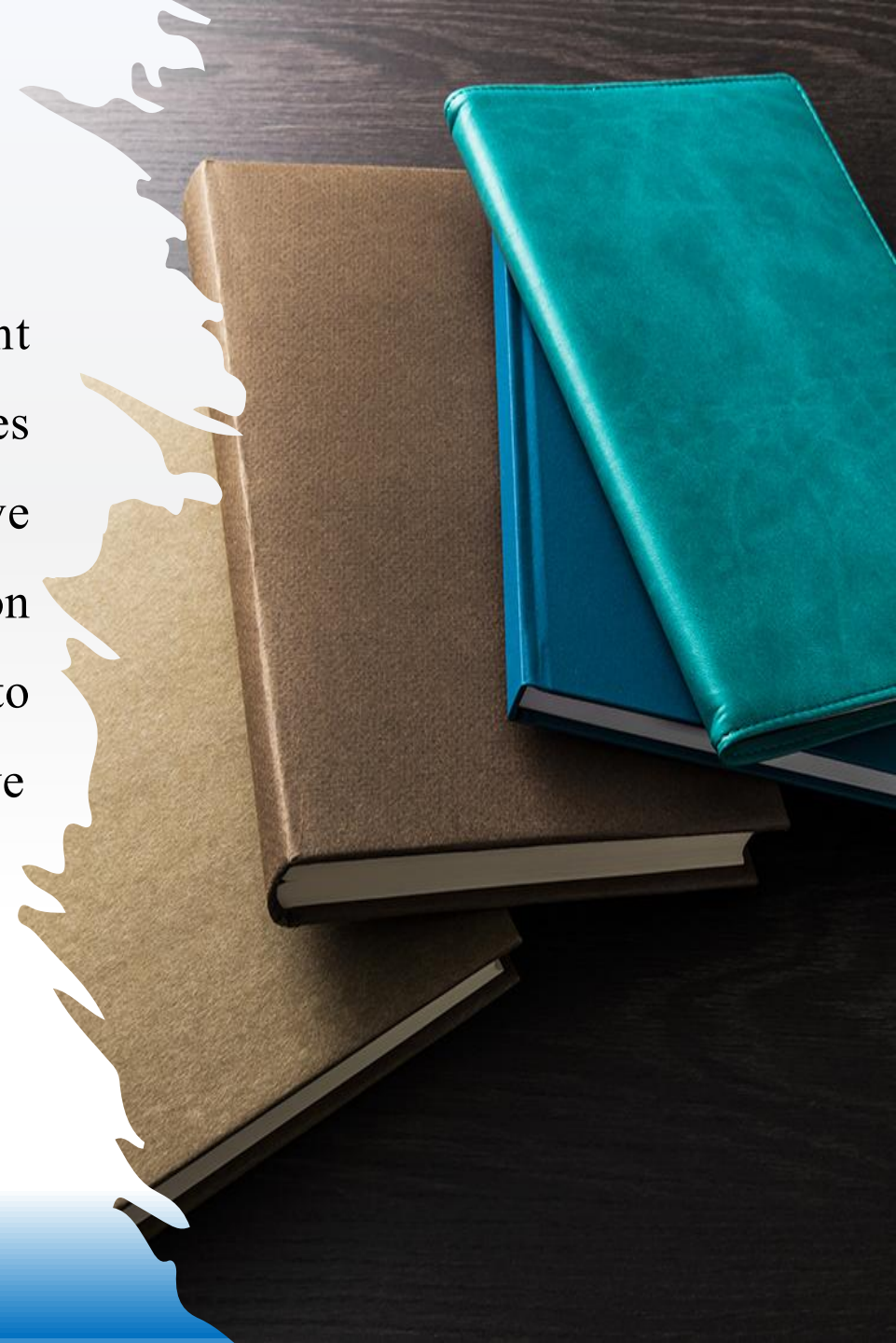
Literature Review cont.

- ❑ According to the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), harmonising the assessment standards would provide the following: Promote Linguistic Equity, Encourage Interregional Communication, Strengthen Cultural Identity, Boost Educational Mobility, Support Technological Development, Enhance Research and Documentation.



Literature Review cont.

- ❑ The ADEA further state that harmonizing education assessment standards in indigenous languages across different African countries can foster greater regional cooperation and understanding, improve educational outcomes, and support the preservation and revitalization of diverse African cultures. It also addresses disparities in access to quality education and ensures that children from all backgrounds have a fair opportunity to succeed.



Theoretical Framework

Constructivist Theory of Learning and Assessment

- ❑ Szabo & Csepes (2023) state that constructivism posits that learners construct knowledge based on their experiences and cultural context.
- ❑ In this study of indigenous languages education, the theory supports the idea that assessments should reflect the linguistic, cultural, and contextual realities of learners.
- ❑ This theory is relevant to this study as it justifies the inclusion of cultural components in indigenous language assessments and supports the arguments that harmonized standards should be culturally responsive and culturally grounded.



Theoretical Framework cont...

Standardisation and Harmonisation Theory in Education

- ❑ Broadfoot (2009) explores how assessment reflect and shape societal values, and this theory explores how common standards can be developed and implemented across diverse systems to ensure consistency, quality, and interoperability.
- ❑ This theory is relevant as it supports the study's aim of assessing and proposing ideal standards for indigenous languages assessments that can serve as a foundation for regional harmonisation.



Theoretical Framework cont...

Comparative Education Theory

- ❑ Bray, Adamson & Mason (2007) state that comparative education examines educational systems, processes, and outcomes, across different context to identify patterns, differences, and best practices.
- ❑ The theory provides a framework for analysing the different examination boards assessment standards for indigenous languages.
- ❑ The theory is relevant in the sense that it underpins the comparative analysis of examination standards across the six selected countries, and it supports the rationale for harmonization to ensure equivalence and mutual recognition of qualifications.



Methodology

- ❑ This study adopted a qualitative research approach.
- ❑ Population: Selected Examination Boards in Southern Africa region.
- ❑ Sampling: Nine Indigenous Languages syllabuses were purposively selected from seven examination boards in the Southern Africa region.
- ❑ Data Collection: Document analysis. According to Indeed Editorial Team (2025), document analysis involves interpreting, gaining understanding of their meaning and develop upon the information they provide. In our case we used public records in the form of Indigenous Languages examination syllabuses from different examination boards in the Southern Africa region.



Methodology

- ❑ Document Analysis: Examination syllabus documents were downloaded from the examination boards' websites to be analysed.
- ❑ Those that were not available from websites were sourced from officials from those particular exam boards.
- ❑ Researchers analysed aims, skills assessed, scheme of assessment and weightings of the syllabuses to come up with what was on the ground among the selected syllabuses.
- ❑ These were compared to come up with the similarities, differences and gaps that exist among the syllabuses. Data was presented through narration and tabulation.



Results

<u>Board</u>	<u>Focus</u>	<u>Skills</u>	<u>Assessment & Weighting</u>
1	Heritage, Culture, Entrepreneurship	All 4 skills	SBA 20%, P1+P2 80%
2	Critical Thinking, Creativity	All 4 skills	P1 50%, P2 50%
3	Language Appreciation	Reading & Writing	P1 25%, P2 25%, P3 50%
4	Self-esteem, Global Skills	All 4 skills	P1 30%, P2 30%, P3 40%
5	Communication, Culture	Reading & Writing	P1 25%, P2 35%, P3 40%
5 (alt)	Practical Communication	All 4 skills	P1 60%, P2 25%, P3 15%
6	Cultural Understanding	All 4 skills	All papers: 100 marks
6 (alt)	Language & Society	All 4 skills	All papers: 100 marks
7	Not specified	All 4 skills	Equal weighting



Findings and Discussions

Main Language Skills Assessed

As Brown (2018) says, a good language assessment should test all the language skills. The findings show that:

Externally Assessed:

- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Reading (all boards)

Internally Assessed (moderated externally)

- ☐ Listening
- ☐ Speaking (only in 2 boards)



Findings and Discussions

Rationale for Skills Assessed

Kimoto (2021) and Brown (2010) also concur with each other that a good assessment should assess grammatical (structure) competences. This has to do with pronunciation, morphology, syntax, semantics orthography and vocabulary. The findings depict that:

- ☐ Focus on Reading/Writing – grammatical and structural assessment
- ☐ Listening/Speaking (often omitted) – assumptions: native speakers don't need it

UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024) mentions that learning through culture and arts promote equity, inclusion, and relevance, especially in diverse African contexts. This is in line with the presence of literature and culture in assessments.

- ☐ Inclusion of literature and cultural materials



Findings and Discussions

Benefits of Harmonised Assessment

Cultural and Academic Achievements

- ❑ Center on English Learning Assessment (CELA) says harmonisation of assessment of indigenous languages:
 - Strengthens cultural identity
 - Supports linguistic diversity

This should be the case in the African context if we seek to promote African language studies in higher education



Findings and Discussions

Benefits of Harmonised Assessment

Mobility and Research Opportunities

- ☐ Van Avermart (2024) and the Protocol on Education and Training in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (2006) Objective G speak of mobility and research which:
 - Facilitates learner/educator movement
 - Enables comparative research
- ☐ Association for the Development of Education in Africa and UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4
 - Encourage educational inclusivity



Findings and Discussions

Benefits of Harmonised Assessment

Equity and Inclusivity

- ❑ The study shows that:
 - 3 syllabuses explicitly address inclusivity
 - Cultural background integrated into assessments
 - This is done in a drive to promote fair assessment across diverse populations



Findings and Discussions

Ideal Standards for Harmonisation

Balboni's (2018) Framework

- ☐ Emphasis on real-life communication
- ☐ Integration of ethical, inclusive education
- ☐ Performance-based assessment encouraged



Findings and Discussions

Ideal Standards for Harmonisation

Key Assessments Elements Across Boards

- ☐ Nation Building and Patriotism
- ☐ Translation
- ☐ Research and Problem Solving
- ☐ Inclusivity
- ☐ Critical Thinking and Communication
- ☐ Indigenous Knowledge Systems



Findings and Discussions

Ideal Standards for Harmonisation

Skill-Based and Performance Assessments

- ☐ Oral Examinations
- ☐ Project Work
- ☐ Digital and Vocational Skills
- ☐ 21 Century Skills: Technical, Emotional, Digital



Findings and Discussions

Schemes of Assessment Overview

Assessment Structures (Examples)

- ☐ Board 1: Creative Writing, comprehension, Language Structures and Project
- ☐ Board 2: Composition, Literature, Proverbs; Translation, Comprehension
- ☐ Board 3: Writing, Reading, Culture



Findings and Discussions

Schemes of Assessment Overview

Diverse Assessments Formats

- ☐ Native vs. Non-native syllabi
- ☐ Practical Assessment
- ☐ Comprehension, Literature, Transactional Writing



Findings and Discussions

Beyond Language

Alignment with SDG 4

- ☐ Entrepreneurship, ICT, Gender, HIV/AIDS, Human Rights
- ☐ Emphasis on sustainable development and inclusive education



Findings and Discussions

Beyond Language

Instructional Methods

- ☐ Board 1: Projects, Case Studies, Debates, Research
- ☐ Board 2: Role-play, Sketches, Research
- ☐ Board 6: Interviews, Panel Discussions, Forums



Findings and Discussions

Beyond Language

Conclusions and Recommendations

- ☐ Harmonising standards enhances equity, mobility, and relevance
- ☐ Indigenous language assessment must reflect:
 - Cultural identity
 - Real-life application
 - Inclusive and ethical education



Findings and Discussions

Beyond Language

Conclusions and Recommendations

❑ Next step:

- Regional collaboration
- Refinement of schemes of assessment
- Pilot harmonised models



Conclusion

- ❑ It is worth mentioning that the four language skills are foundational for testing grammar competence and conceptual understanding as it aligns with scholarly insights as depicted earlier in the study.
- ❑ All examination boards externally assess reading and writing skills emphasizing on the language structure, vocabulary expansion, and coherent communication.
- ❑ However, there is inconsistent in the assessment of listening and speaking skills. Where assessed, these two skills are internally assessed but externally moderated.



Conclusion cont...

- ❑ It is concluded that a common assessment framework promotes cultural identity, linguistic diversity, and academic mobility.
- ❑ This fosters regional integration, especially for learners and educators moving across borders for education and research.
- ❑ Harmonisation would establish a strong foundation for research, particularly in areas like translation, indigenous knowledge systems, and sociolinguistics practices.
- ❑ Aligned assessments promote equity ensuring that learners are assessed fairly based on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- ❑ This aligns with ADEA's principles and Sustainable Development Goal 4.



Conclusion cont...

- ❑ The findings affirms that while there is a solid foundation across Southern African examination boards in assessing reading and writing skills, there is a pressing need to standardise and elevate the assessment of listening and speaking, cultural competencies, and performance-based tasks.
- ❑ Harmonisation would not only support regional academic integration and mobility bur also contribute to preserving and advancing African indigenous languages as tools for education, identity, and sustainable development.



Recommendations

- Examination boards should **collaborate** to harmonize standards.
- Include **cultural heritage** and **intercultural competence** in assessments.
- Adopt **inclusive and performance-based** assessment methods.
- Align with **international frameworks** while maintaining local relevance.
- Examination boards should strengthen the inclusivity in the assessment of languages to be in line with Sustainable Developmental Goal 4, and most probably with each examination board's policy in their objectives of their scheme of assessment.



Recommendations cont...

- All boards should assess all the language skills.
- Have similar structure (components) and weightings.
- Use same template (style of presentation of the assessment syllabus).
- Teacher development for close-to-perfection harmony.





Thank you!