Chapter 5

Second-chance Assessments: Social Justice Action or Assessment Disruption

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Abstract

With the sudden onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, higher education institutions were forced to move to online systems of learning and teaching. Concerns about inequitable access to online platforms led to our university recommending that we offer students a second chance to improve their marks. It is of interest to investigate the effect that the second-chance assessments had on the overall marks. In this mixed-methods study, I look closely at two modules which offered students slightly different second-chance opportunities. The purpose is to examine how the second-chance intervention impacted on the marks in two modules. Data were generated from the marks of the students enrolled in the two modules. In addition, an unstructured interview was conducted with the student whose marks improved the most, to gain his perspective of the impact of the second-chance intervention on him. The findings show that in both cases the outcomes significantly changed, raising issues about whether the second-chance intervention offers equitable access or whether it in effect lowers the quality of the assessment. The student's perspective suggests that the second-chance intervention was an equitable opportunity for students who were disadvantaged by the current circumstances.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, online learning, performance, assessments, second chance

1 Introduction

Spurred on by a commitment to overturn apartheid legacies, the higher education sector in South Africa expanded dramatically over the past two decades, almost doubling in size. The number of students enrolled in higher education in 1994 was 495 000 (Ramrathan 2016) and this number grew to approximately 984 000 in 2013 (SAIRR 2016). The large numbers are of benefit to many universities, since one of the factors that determine government funding to universities is the use of the numbers of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) students, whereby large numbers of students translate to larger subsidies from the government. However, FTE graduations are also factored into the formula for funding (Pillay 2004). Hence, universities have prioritized the improvement of pass rates. This move can also be seen as a response to the increasing market-driven pressure to improve the competitiveness of the higher education institutions (Mcfarlane & Tomlinson 2017).

With the onset of COVID, and the sudden shift to online learning, universities understandably, fearing an impending cut to subsidies should pass rates suddenly plummet, tried to intervene so as to stop any sudden decrease in the pass rates. There was concern that many students would be disadvantaged because of inequitable access to digital platforms and hence the performance of the university would be affected. The university where I teach instituted a wide range of interventions to enable students to continue with their studies within the online mode. However, there were still many problems and when the lockdown levels were moved to Level 3, most students were allowed to return to the student residences, which provided more reliable access to Wi-Fi. Lecturers were encouraged to offer students opportunities to improve their scores, especially for those students who were considered to be at risk of failing.

With the removal of the supplementary examination that is traditionally offered as a second chance to pass, our teaching and learning offices encouraged lecturers to offer students who were at risk a second chance at assessments. The second chance could be in the form of giving students an opportunity to repeat an assessment, or to do another, similar assessment. However, it is important to consider whether this second chance could have led to students gaining higher marks than they would have received under normal circumstances. Research from across the world suggests that with the move to online platforms, it has become easier to pass and to do well (Gonzalez *et al.* 2020; Hale 2021; Karadag 2021).

In this chapter, I look closely at how marks changed in two mathematics methods modules after students had been granted a second chance to complete assessments. The purpose is to examine how the second-chance intervention impacted on the marks in two modules, and to pose the question whether it is in fact making it easier for students to pass, or whether it is rightfully offering disadvantaged students an equitable opportunity to pass.

2 Literature Review

In this literature review I first consider the neoliberal context within which universities have been working and how this influences the drive to improve pass rates. This is then followed by a closer look at the move to online platforms as a response to the Covid challenges. The second part of the literature review focuses on perspectives of assessment.

It is assumed that university education has a humanistic approach that values individuals and their aspirations and helps students to transition to the adult working world. However, in recent times, many scholars have noted that higher education has increasingly developed a performativity culture driven by neoliberal values (Kenny 2017; Mcfarlane & Tomlinson 2017). Neoliberalism is a school of thought that is driven by the idea that 'profit seeking would lead to efficiencies' (Maistry & Africa 2020:2). A central assumption of neoliberalism is that the role of the state is to govern and to create the policy conditions for markets to thrive. Across the world, neoliberal policies have led to corporate management styles that prioritise efficiency and productivity in teaching and research (Kenny 2017). This has led to an increased focus on graduation rates and levels of student achievement (Mcfarlane & Tomlinson 2017). This is especially the case in South Africa where the higher education sector has increased dramatically. Universities in South Africa have become complicit in advancing the neo-liberalist policies, because part of their funding from government is based on formulae related to the number of FTE students as well as FTE graduations. However in recent years, a large part of the university funding comes from external sources, thus making it more important that the university is seen as competitive and efficient. The reforms in higher education have been driven by policies which seek to make the universities more efficient by improving the rate of completion of degrees and success rates in the courses (Mcfarlane & Tomlinson 2017).

When faced with the pandemic, universities, on the one hand, were con-

cerned that the sudden forced movement to online learning would lead to lower graduation rates which would have a negative impact on their reputation and ability to attract funds and students. Universities tried to implement a range of interventions to mitigate against this perceived drop in engagement levels of students, one of which is the focus of this study. On the other hand, there have been concerns that online learning in fact leads to grade inflation.

Mark inflation or grade inflation refers to the allocation of higher marks for work that should have received lower marks, so that the averages or overall class marks of students are higher than expected (Berezvai, Lukats & Molontay 2020). This creates the appearance that they performed better in a course than they actually did.

In the UK, there was concern that the proportion of top degrees awarded in recent years has been increasing and universities have agreed to try to monitor the trend (Hussain 2020). Some practices that lead to the grade inflation include rounding up of grades or ignoring the lowest marks so that the overall grade could seem higher. With the onset of the pandemic, universities made changes to policies so as to transition to online learning and assessments (Hale 2021). Universities tried to offer increased support to mitigate the 'digital poverty' experienced by mainly disadvantaged students (Hale 2021). Digitally poor individuals lack access to digital technologies because of a lack of knowledge, or because of financial considerations (Barrantes 2007). Hale (2021) notes that there was a 6% increase in the upper awards in 2020, which is important to understand and interrogate as we move forward in these unprecedented and challenging times. In Turkey, Karadag (2021) carried out a study with five universities and found an increase of 9.21% in the average lecture grades during the pandemic when compared to those of the previous year. The grade inflation occurred as the move to online learning took place. A study conducted in Spain with 458 students from three universities found that there was a significantly positive effect of the Covid-19 confinement on the students' results (Gonzalez *et al.* 2020). Here at UKZN, most clusters in the School of Education recorded increases in the pass rates between 2019 and 2020 (Bansilal & Rosenberg 2021). In the Mathematics and Computer Science Education and the Science and Technology Education clusters, there was an overall increase of 10% and 8%, respectively, which may be seen as grade inflation. This trend of increasing pass rates motivated me to look at how the second-chance intervention resulted in higher pass rates during the shift to online learning at my university.

Blackley *et al.* (2021) remind us that online learning during the time of

Covid-19 was not a new phenomenon, but it was different from the kind of online learning that was available before the pandemic. During the pandemic, online learning was forced, and can be described as emergency remote learning or crisis-prompted online learning (Hodges *et al.* 2020; Gacs, Goertler & Spasova 2020). This move was not planned and took place before the necessary engagement and training could be done to ensure its success. Blackley *et al.* (2021) note that the forced transition with the limited planning time may inadvertently have resulted in simply transferring the traditional teaching to an online setting.

Although educators may feel that the introduction of technology-based engagement intensified their teaching duties (Kenny 2017), we need to be mindful of our role in advancing social justice. Teaching is a political activity and requires that teachers rise above the everyday demands of teaching (Kumashiro 2008). Advancing social justice pedagogies requires the development of critical consciousness in students and teachers, which involves 'learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take actions against oppressive elements of reality' (Freire 1970:35). Hence, in conceptualizing critical consciousness, critical reflections need to be accompanied by critical actions (Kokka 2020). We are reminded by Kokka (2020:4) of Gutstein's (2006) goals of teaching mathematics for social justice, which includes 'succeeding academically … on standardized tests' as well as 'gaining conceptual understanding' in mathematics. These goals make it clear that teaching mathematics for social justice includes the goal of helping your students succeed academically in the traditional sense, while also attending to broader goals such as taking action to change the world, and developing positive identities (Kokka 2020). During the crisis-prompted online learning, as social justice practitioners, it is important for us to engage in critical reflections to identify inequities which may be perpetuated by the situation and if necessary, to take critical actions to reduce these inequities.

Almost 90 years ago, Dewey (1933:118) described reflective action as involving 'an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds supporting it', and it is as relevant today as it was then. As social justice practitioners, it is important for us to take cognizance of Dewey's words and examine the assumptions upon which our pedagogic decisions are made. Furthermore, we should be prepared to take critical actions when called upon to do so, as in this instance of allowing additional opportunities for assessments to students who may have been otherwise disadvantaged.

This chapter represents my interrogation of the module assessments done

during the pandemic using the online platforms as well as the critical actions that were taken in response to the university's request for second-chance assessments.

In trying to understand issues related to overall scores, we need to look first at the underlying process of assessment that is used to determine these scores. All assessment tasks should be measured against the basic education principles of content, learning and equity if they are to derive the best outcome from the learners (Messick 1989). For a mathematics assessment to meet the content principle, it must reflect the key mathematics concepts that are crucial for learners to learn (Messick 1989). Besides the content principles, mathematics assessments should also be measured against the extent to which they reflect the learning principles which are based on how learning has improved. Assessment should cater for all groups of learners in terms of supporting their learning process, allowing them to engage with mathematical tasks while developing proficiency in mathematics. Equity principles are based on the question of whether an assessment favours one group over another group for reasons that have nothing to do with the purpose of the assessment, whether comparisons with performance standards are justifiable and whether the tasks are accessible to students (Frederiksen & Collins 1989). In the online environment brought on by the Covid pandemic, the equity principle requires of instructors to provide students with the opportunity and necessary support for their learning. The online teaching environment has brought digital and social inequalities to the fore and instructors need to ensure that students are not disadvantaged regarding digital access (Stoykov & Yilmaz 2021)

Knight (2002) asserts that student achievement is related to the extent and quality of engagement that the student has done. The engagement is not the same as the amount of time spent on, and involvement in a task, but should include involvement and participation within communities of practice and in varied networks. Knight (2002) is of the view that the strongest influence on learning is the assessment procedures. We often distinguish between formative and summative assessment as assessment for learning and assessment of learning respectively. Yorke (2003) describes formative assessment as assessment whose main purpose is to enhance learning through the provision of feedback. Hannafin, Hannafin and Dalton (1993) distinguish between four types of feedback, namely task feedback, process feedback, self-regulation and self-feedback. The first type involves clarifying the instructions and activities entailed, while process feedback provides information on how a student can proceed with the task. Self-regulation is focused on how students can monitor the strategies that they use

while self-feedback focuses on personal attributes of the student such as how well they have done. Yorke (2003) describes a study where engineering students made a marked improvement which was attributable to the time spent on the task, as well as the promptness of the feedback that was received.

When assessment involves using evidence to make inferences about what was learnt or achieved, this is referred to as a feed-out function of assessment (Knight 2006). In improving the feed-out function, we must ensure that the evidential basis of the inferences is sound (Matters 2009). The assessment process often involves a jump from performance to inference, which may not always be apparent (Matters 2009). Judgements are made based on how well the evidence matches the criteria. Inferences that students have met the outcomes of the course based on their assessment results may not hold true if the assessment was not well designed or properly administered to measure those outcomes. If the evidence is not solid, and we do not recognise the gaps, then the inferences we make will not hold, which is related to the validity of the assessment.

Nitko (2001) explains that the concept of validity applies to the ways in which we interpret and use the assessment results and cautions that the use you make of your assessment results are valid only to the degree to which you can point to evidence that supports their correctness and appropriateness. Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results and is defined as 'the degree to which students' results are the same … when they complete different but equivalent tasks on the same or different occasions' (Nitko 2001:63). If we take an assessment tool as being reliable, it will mean that the score generated is one which a learner would be able to obtain under other circumstances as well. For large-scale, decontextualised mathematics test items, the reliability criterion could be judged by using statistical methods such as Cohen's kappa coefficient or Kronbach's alpha (Gaur & Gaur 2006), but it is harder to establish reliability for open-ended assessments and one that is scored by different people. Knight argues that it is easier to establish reliability in the case of uncontentious evidence, as in the case of simple and unambiguous assessment processes which have a lower cognitive demand. Hence, instructors may resort to using simpler assessments, because it is more straightforward to establish what is correct and what is not.

3 Methods

This study is a mixed-methods study, because it includes both quantitative and qualitative research methods. As a mixed-methods study, it takes on a sequential

explanatory design where the quantitative data (assessment scores) were collected first, which informs the qualitative data collection (Creswell 2013). For this study I downloaded the quantitative data from the Learning Management system of the university. I first considered the assessment records as they were being tallied for the original scores of the module once the teaching was completed and then again at the end when the final scores were tallied for submission to the exams board. The records of 94 students from the Algebra, Functions and Calculus Methods of Teaching module, and those of 23 students who were enrolled in the Geometry Methods of Teaching module were considered. Qualitative data were sourced from an interview with one student whose marks showed the greatest improvement. The purpose of the unstructured interview was to understand why the student was so far behind and how he was able to catch up on the work.

The statistical tests that were conducted were paired-sample t-tests, also known as repeated-measures t-test. These are used when you have one group of people and you collect data from them on two different occasions or under two different conditions. If the p-value of the test is $< 0,05$, then we can conclude that the difference between the two sets of scores is significantly different (Palant 2010).

3.1 Details of the Modules

The first semester of 2021 started on 8 March because of the delays in the previous year due to the Covid pandemic.

There were 94 students enrolled in the Algebra Method module, which consisted of 17 assessments in total made up as follows:

Table 1: Details of the algebra method module

Assessment (Algebra method module)	Weighting
Nine tutorial tests (mc)	10%
Five classroom activities (open-ended)	10%
one video presentation	10%
Major test 1	35%
Major Test 2	35%

The Geometry Method module is a third-year pipeline module, currently

being phased out as part of the old BEd. There were 23 students in the class, of which 43% were in the fourth or later years, adding an extra dimension of pressure to pass the module and exit the system. There were 14 assessments in total, made up as follows:

Table 2: Details of the geometry method module

Assessment (geometry method module)	Weighting
Nine Tutorial tests (mc)	20%
Three classroom activities (open-ended)	10%
Major test 1 and Major Test 2	70%

4 Results

The university management encouraged lecturers to give students multiple opportunities to complete the assessments so that students would not be disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control. Hence students were given a second chance to improve their marks in the module, using a different approach in each case. For the Algebra module, students requested a second chance in selected assessments, while in the Geometry module, everybody was allowed to do any of the assessments again.

I now discuss the results for each module.

4.1 Changes in the Marks for the Algebra Module

With the Algebra Method module, students who requested a second chance on any of the assessments that they had failed, were granted that opportunity. The mean of the marks for the algebra module before the second chance was 56,7%, and 59,7% after the adjustments, representing an increase of 5% on the original mean.

The graph in Figure 1 shows the distribution of the marks in the original total and in the final total (after a second chance).

The categories are those who failed outright (0–39%); those who would have qualified for a supplementary under normal conditions (40–49%), those who just

managed to pass (50–59%), those who coped well (60–74%), and those who did very well (75–100%).

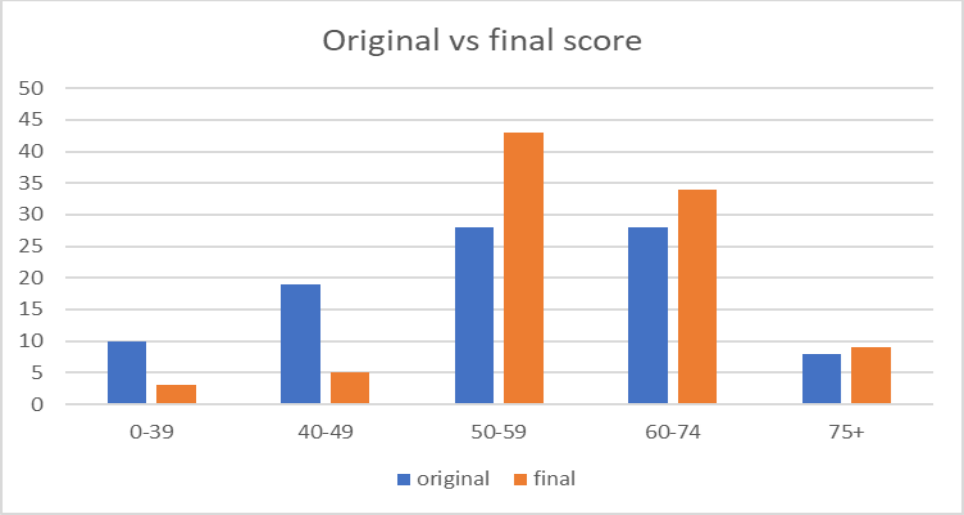

Figure 1: Bar Graph showing distribution of marks before and after second chance in algebra module.

The graph shows a spread of the marks with a large number of students clustered at the 45–50% mark band – this is the result of the remarking, as shown by the distribution before re-submission was allowed. As seen in the graph above (Original total) the large cluster from below 50% has moved to the large cluster that lies between 50–55% (Final total). The details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of marks in the Original and Final total for the algebra module

Categories	Original Total	Final total
0–39 (outright fail)	10	3
40–49 (previous supp condition)	19	5
50–59 (just passed)	29	43
60–74 (coping well)	28	34
75+ (very good)	8	9
Mean mark	56.7	59.7

The mean of the marks improved by 5%. The paired samples t-test show that there was a significant increase in the marks from the original total (M= 56.72, SD=12.39) to the final total (M= 59,75, SD=10.45), t (92) =5.41, $p < 0.005$.

Here is a scatter graph showing how the individual students' scores changed after the second chance.

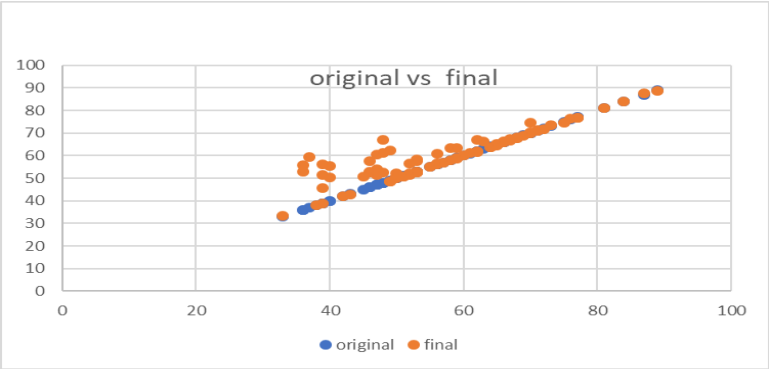

Figure 2: Graph showing the original versus the adjusted (final) total for each student for algebra

As is evident in Figure 2, most of the marks after adjustment were close to the original, since only 62 marks remained unchanged. Table 4 presents the distribution of the changes in the marks for each student. For each difference, the number of students who had that difference is given.

Table 4: Frequency of differences in scores for the algebra module

Change in Score	Frequency
0	62
1-5	13
6-10	7
11-15	6
16-20	4
>20	1

Table 4 shows that there was one student whose mark increased by more than 20 marks, which is quite a steep increase.

4.2 Changes in the Marks for the Geometry Module

In Table 5, the original scores (Original Total) represent the marks of students at the end of the first deadline, when all the assessments were due. When the marks were calculated, it was found that more than half the class would not pass. Consistent with the Covid interventions of allowing students multiple chances to attempt their tasks again, I then decided to distribute the marks so that for the major tests, we took the better of the two scores. At this stage, although the marks improved, 40% of the class still did not pass. I then decided to open up all the tasks for students to try again, allowing them a full week to complete the multiple-choice quizzes and to submit outstanding open-ended assessments. Table 5 presents a distribution of the three sets of marks – the original total, the rescored total – where the higher of the two major test marks was taken and the final total after the second chance. The categories considered are the same as those for Figure 1 and Table 3.

Table 5: Distribution of marks in three scenarios for the geometry module

Categories	Original Total	Re-scored best of MT	Final Total
0-39 (outright fail)	6	2	1
40-49 (previous supp condition)	6	7	2
50-59 (just passed)	6	7	7
60-74 (coping well)	4	3	8
75+ (very good)	1	4	5
Mean mark	45.9	53.8	60.0

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the marks in the original total (before), intermediate and the new total (after).

These clustered bar graphs show that although there were six students who originally fell into the outright fail category, after the two stages this was reduced to one student, who did not participate at all. In total only three students (13%) did not pass after the two stage – adjustment process. On the other side, originally there was only one student who obtained a distinction while five received distinctions in total. In the coping well group, distinctions doubled from four to eight.

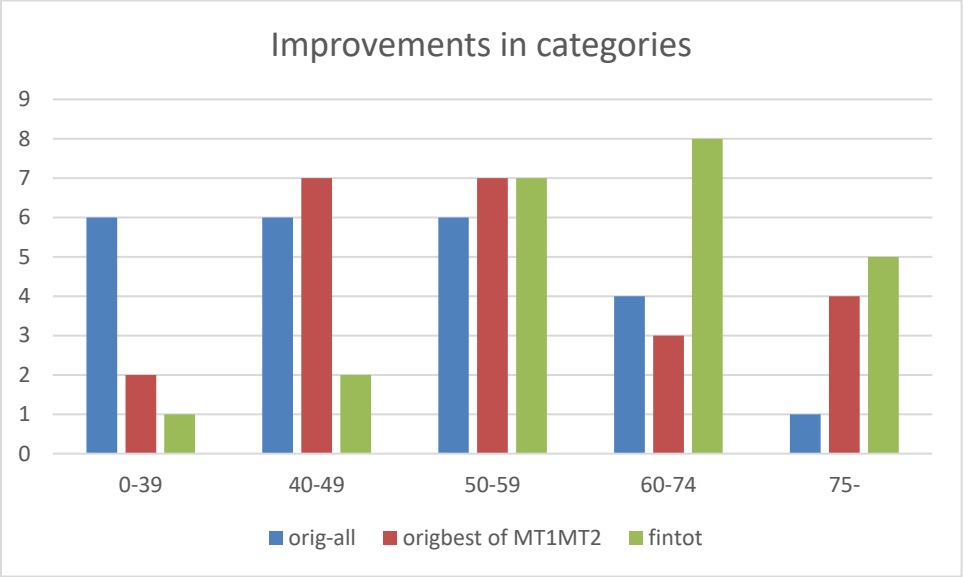

Figure 3: Bar Graph showing differences in marks in original, intermediate and the final scenarios in the geometry module

Statistical tests show that changes in marks at each stage were statistically significant. The paired samples t-test conducted on the student scores after the first stage of adjustments shows that there was a significant increase in the marks from the Original All Total (M= 45.89, SD=17.90) to the Original Re-scored best of Two Tests Total (M= 53.78, SD=18.07), $t\ (22)=5.41$, $p < 0.005$. Furthermore, the paired samples t-test conducted at the second stage shows that there was a significant increase in the marks from the Original Re-scored Best of two tests Total (M= 53.78, SD=18.07) to the New Final Total (M= 59.96, SD=17.14), $t\ (22)=3.49$, $p < 0.005$.

The mean of the Original Total was 45,9, while the mean of the adjusted scores is 60 (New Final), which represents an increase on average of 30%.

The scatter graph below in Figure 4 provides a visual image of the changes for each student at each stage, where the blue dots representing the original total are shown on a line; the orange dots show the changes at the first step; and the green dots are the scores at the second step of the changes.

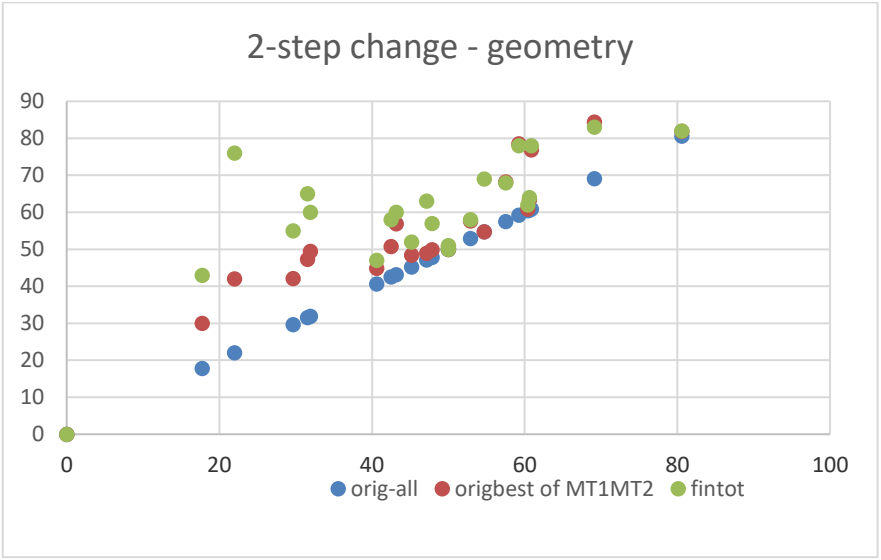

Figure 4: Scatter Graph showing the original versus the two stages of adjustments in the geometry module

Figure 4 presents a visual picture of how each student's scores changed after the second chance. Unlike the algebra method modules where two-thirds of the students had no change, in this geometry method module only two students had no change. Here is the frequency of the difference in the overall scores for the geometry module.

Table 6: Frequency of differences in scores for geometry module

Change in score	Frequency
0	2
1-5	5
6-10	3
11-15	3
16-20	5
21-25	2
26-30	1
>30	2

Table 6 and Figure 4 show that there was a much bigger change in the marks for the Geometry module when compared to the Algebra module. Notably there were two students whose marks increased by over 30 marks.

4.3 Student Perspective: The Case of Mlu

The largest increase across both modules was achieved by student Mlu in the Geometry module, as shown in Figure 5, which indicates that the increase in Mlu's mark was from 22 (original) to 76 (final total).

During the interview Mlu explained that he was funded by the Provincial Government and his payment was delayed because of the many communication problems. He said, '*They do not pay on the exact time, the payments take a delayed time'.* However, when the payment was made, the university systems took very long to reflect the payment and to direct it to the School of Education: '*Then, when they did make the payment, it did not appear on the system'.*

He was quite desperate, but when he was on the verge of giving up, he received a message on 26 May that he was registered, two months after the semester had started.

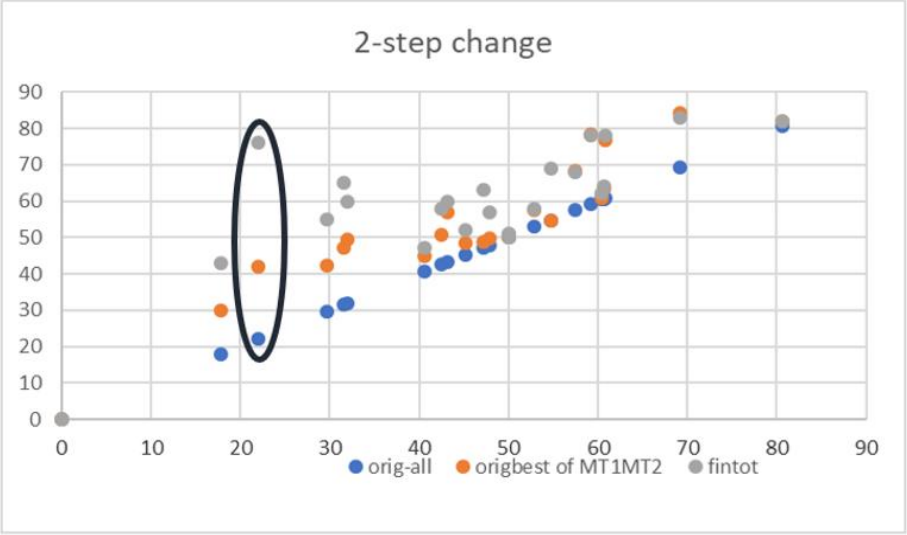

Figure 5: Scatter graph showing change in Mlu's scores

Mlu described the Herculean task that he faced in catching up with the work in the five modules that he was registered for. For the next few weeks, he slept from 6:00 to 8:00 in the mornings and had a nap later in the night. To keep himself from feeling overwhelmed, Mlu reminded himself to '*take everything step by step'*. He tried to be methodical in covering the work across all the modules: '*I would go to one module, first one task, then go to another module, finish one task, and to the next module*'. He then went back to the first module and finished the second task and then rotated them again.

He also tried to vary the tasks that he did according to the time of the day, working out tutorials for Maths and Method in the morning, reading up on Theory for Education Studies in the early hours of the morning. He worked hard in the morning on tutorials: '*From 9:00 until 3:00 I would do all the tutorials for all modules … practicals, tutorials'*. He took advantage of the quiet times in the night, which was when he looked at the notes and theories in the modules. '*I relegated my theory studies to 12:00 to 4:00, when it is quiet- everyone is sleeping – I can concentrate. I would put my music on and just work.*

In the early hours of the morning, he changed his strategy and at 4:00, he focused on checking his own progress to see where he was in the overall picture, which was a key part of this self-regulated learning process: '*After four, I would test myself, check each module … to make sure that I have made progress and not going in circles'*.

These strategies used by Mlu are described by Yorke (2003) as self-regulation (monitoring success of the strategies) and self-feedback (focusing on how well they have done), which are effective ways of improving learning.

He found it very useful that recordings were posted on the learning site, because he was able to watch selected Zoom lectures. He only watched them after reading up on the notes on PowerPoints, and then would decide which ones to watch. Then he would tackle some assessments or tests that were due. He explained reserved the 12:00 to 4:00 slot for learning theory, because it was the quietest time of the day.

He said he felt as if he was in another world and watching himself from out of his body. For the method course, when those second chances were given, for him, most of them it was the first chance. He chose to do them as he mastered the sections. The assessment that he did the worst in was the second major test, although he said he had worked really hard on it. It was focused on phrasing conditional statements and inverses of statements, and the teaching of tangents, ratio and proportion and similar triangles. He passed with 57%, but with the first

test he obtained 80%; thus taking the best of the two marks really helped to boost his final score. Overall, in the end, he passed four out of the five modules.

5 Discussion

The findings of the study show that across both modules the second-chance assessments improved students' marks. By allowing students to re-submit assessments, the success rates were changed substantially. The statistical tests confirm that the marks after the second-chance assessment was statistically significantly higher from their original scores for both modules. For the Geometry module, the number of students who did not pass decreased from 12 to 3; hence the pass rate increased from 48% to 61%, which is a percentage increase of 27%. For the Algebra module, the number who failed decreased from 29 to 8; hence the pass rate increased from 69% to 92%, which is a percentage increase of 33%. These increases suggest that the grade inflation reported for the clusters in the School of Education may be explained to some extent by this second-chance intervention. The second chance made it significantly easier for students to pass and made it easier to do well. It could be inferred that the reliability of the assessments have been affected. Nitko's (2001:63) perspective of reliability is that it refers to the consistency of assessment results and is 'the degree to which student's results are the same … when they complete different but equivalent tasks on the same or different occasions'. This perspective suggests that the second-chance intervention impacted on the reliability of the assessments for the two modules, The second-chance assessments enabled the marks for both the modules to be inflated, which also provides more insight into the grade inflation that was detected for some of the clusters in the School of Education (Bansilal & Rosenberg 2021).

However, it is important to remember that learning, and achievement, is about engagement (Knight 2002). One can argue that offering these second-chance assessments allowed the students further opportunities to engage more deeply. This experience helps us to understand the powerful impact that formative assessments can have on learning by providing self-feedback (Evans 2013) so that when students attempted the tasks again, they improved their marks.

Advancing social justice pedagogies requires of us as educators to recognise contradictions and 'to take actions' against perceived injustice (Freire 1970:35). In the midst of this crisis- prompted online learning (Hodges *et al.*

2020), many students experienced disruptions, and required further opportunities to engage with the materials. Mlu was one such student who, through no fault of his own, was not able to register in time. By granting him those second chances he was able, through his Herculean efforts, to meet the demands of the module. Mlu described his self-regulated learning (Yorke 2003) that allowed him to engage deeply with the content of the modules within the restricted timeframe. The critical reflections central to advancing social justice pedagogies support such actions (Kumashiro 2008). Behind each of those dots in the scatter graph, there is a person who, when granted the second chance, was able to pass. Thus, a social justice perspective (Kumashiro 2008; Frederiksen & Collins 1989) argues that granting the second chance was the appropriate action to reduce the inequities.

We are mindful of the context within which the university's policy decision of the second-chance intervention was made. Within the current culture of performativity permeating higher education institutions (Mcfarlane & Tomlinson 2017), the intervention was more likely to be directed by a fear of a decline in rankings than by a social justice perspective. Universities want to avoid a situation where the pass rates are decreased, which may send a signal to funders and other stakeholders that the performativity of the university was declining. In terms of ensuring that the standards of the university do not decline, it is more important to ensure that our administration systems are working optimally. If Mlu's payments were recognised earlier on, his registration would not have been so delayed and his studies would have been less stressful. Efficient administrative systems will help to enhance the university's reputation.

This study, situated within the context of online learning, cannot ignore the issue of cheating. Some authors have expressed a concern that cheating is becoming increasingly common among students, posing a challenge to the integrity of academic institutions (Goff *et al.* 2020; CHE-UsAF- UFS 2021; Comas-Forgas *et al.* 2021). The report by the CHE (CHE-UsAF UFS 2021:8) that surveyed lecturers from most HEIs in SA noted that one of the most disturbing findings concerned 'the integrity of academic assessments as a result of cheating'. A study in Spain (Comas-Forgas *et al.* 2021) using search engine data analysis showed that there was a significant increase in online searches about how to cheat during the Covid-19 lockdown period. It is therefore likely that part of the grade inflation identified in this study may be due to cheating made easier by the online environment. There is an additional dimension at UKZN; many of our students have returned to their residences and are physically

present on campus. As students meet and work together in the residences or campus, there are many opportunities to collude on their assessments, as witnessed by a colleague at our institution (Bansilal & Rosenberg 2021). In moving forward, we should also be cognisant of the challenges posed by cheating and should endeavour to reduce the opportunities for cheating.

6 Conclusion

This study focused on a policy of the university that was prompted by the objective of not wanting students to be left behind, and requested that students should be offered multiple opportunities for assessment. I argue that this intervention was more likely directed by the objective of avoiding declining rankings than by a social justice perspective. As part of my own critical reflections as a lecturer, I studied the ways in which the intervention led to an increase in marks in two modules, to try to understand whether the second- chance intervention led to grade inflation or whether it rightfully offered disadvantaged students an equitable opportunity to pass. The reflections were prompted in part, by the analysis of the increase in pass rates in our school (Bansilal & Rosenberg 2021), which showed large increases over the years 2019 to 2020.

In this chapter I considered two contrasting perspectives about the inflation in the marks. On the one hand, the assessment validity perspective suggests that the assessment process had been disrupted. The results show that that the marks were significantly increased by this intervention in both modules, showing that there was grade inflation. These results are supported by many studies conducted during the pandemic era which showed increased pass rates in many countries (Gonzalez *et al.* 2020; Karadag 2021; Hale 2021). The consistent increase in pass rates raise concerns about the integrity of the assessments across HEIs, which needs to be urgently investigated.

On the other hand, a social justice perspective requires of educators to move beyond just engaging in critical reflections, but to pursue actions actively to reduce perceived inequities (Kumashiro 2008). Within this perspective, the intervention was necessary for those students who were disadvantaged by the move to online learning. The case of Mlu highlighted how he was disadvantaged by administrative delays and benefited from the second chance intervention.

As academics, we should try to balance these two perspectives in our teaching and assessment by trying to present equitable opportunities to our students whilst taking care that students are learning what they need to.

Academics should ensure that they are constantly engaging with their students so that we identify and reduce inequities experienced by particular students whilst also recognising instances of possible cheating. The university community has to work together and actively tackle the problem of online cheating by considering hybrid assessments, assessments which focus on higher order skills, and other innovative solutions.

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