



Contribution ID: 44

Type: **Poster Presentation**

Perceptions of physics - Are we placing too much emphasis on technical skills?

Tuesday, 2 October 2018 17:06 (20 minutes)

The South African Institute of Physics and the Council on Higher Education identified that there are many challenges associated with physics teaching and learning. We report on the results of a pilot study that attempted to identify the perceptions of first-year students studying physics at Rhodes University in 2017. Academics were interviewed, a questionnaire was created and a survey of first-year students was conducted. Focus groups were run with the second- and third-year students to acquire qualitative data to help understand the quantitative data received from the first-years. Emotional issues were identified as the largest contributing factor to students' perceptions of physics. A high correlation between study skills and students' understanding and problem-solving abilities was also observed. Under-preparedness was recognised as an important issue that needs further investigation.

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Session Classification: Poster Session

Track Classification: Track A - Physics at University