NOSIPHO MNGOMA

FUNANI Shezi used a car battery to charge her laptop as she spent hours studying by candlelight. And yesterday, all those painstaking hours paid off, as Shezi graduated with a master’s degree in education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The teacher from Nkandla, northern KwaZulu-Natal, did not let adversity get in the way of her education. From her meagre salary she bought a solar panel to power her laptop, but on cloudy days, she would write out her work on paper.

This is because her home area does not have electricity or running water.

“I had to use water from the nearby river for drinking and washing. I needed healthy food so I laid out a vegetable garden to get fresh produce,” she said.

All these hardships were compounded by the loss of her sister. Her job and duties as a mother to her own children and those of her late sister meant Shezi had to study in the middle of the night.

That is if she was not braving muddy, slippery roads to drive the 400km to attend classes at the university.

“I believe in working hard for success. Brighten the corner where you are. If you show love and respect to the community, they will also love and respect you,” Shezi said.

She hopes to implement the findings of her research to improve the lives of pupils in her school and community. It focused on the experiences of Grade 4 pupils studying maths through the medium of English after being taught in Zulu as their mother tongue in the foundation phase.

Shezi found that the children battled to understand English while learning maths. Test scores revealed that they performed better in the Zulu version than in the English equivalent of the same test.

Now, she would like children to be taught basic English for maths.

“Mathematics is not the problem. It’s the language, and once our children learn the basics, they will excel.”