

## AWARDING DEGREES IN LEARNING EXCLUDING CHARACTER ASSESSMENT: MAIN CAUSE OF CRISES IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are said to be awarding degrees and diplomas in character and learning. However, empirical observation has shown that the claim is hardly true in practice. Experience shows that no character assessment is done by the institutions. As for learning, a thorough assessment is usually carried out via strictly conducted academic examinations, tests, and assignments. Meanwhile, the character that boards on students' personal qualities, leadership qualities, physical and mental abilities, social interactions, resourcefulness in terms of initiative, and creativity are never assessed. Hence, most students' conduct and behaviour on campus are observed to be appalling except for a negligible few. The university administrations have not made any arrangements to assess any aspect of the character of the students. Consequently, the students too have developed careless attitudes about their conduct and behaviour towards those they interact with, laterally and vertically upwards as well as downwards. This paper tried to find out if non-character assessment and evaluation in our tertiary institutions is not responsible for poor discipline, moral decadence, and even cultism. This paper employed a descriptive survey research design as a guide and then collected primary and secondary data using a structured questionnaire. Then the data was qualitatively analysed using simple percentages. The results revealed that non-assessment and evaluation of students' character in universities during the learning process are responsible for disciplinary-related crises on university campuses in Nigeria. The panacea is recommended to be an introduction to character assessment of students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.*

**Keywords: Character Assessment, Learning Process, Disciplinary-related Crises, Academic Performance, Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria.**

## Introduction

Tertiary institutions, especially universities, are accepted and recognised worldwide to be the pinnacles of knowledge and citadels of learning. Ordinarily, it is believed that for one to experience the rigours of passing through primary, secondary and sometimes intermediary levels of education before reaching the tertiary level, taking judicial notice, it is presumed that one must have attained acceptable level of maturity. Therefore, it is expected that one must have also acquired a considerable degree of stability in his or her moral, ethical, good attitude, amiable social conduct, and self-discipline. It is against this background that such individuals are presumed to be capable of managing their time, resources, personal conduct, and studies. Therefore, it is expected that they should merely need to be supervised and lectured only in academics, more than mentoring, monitoring, and assessing their personal character and conduct while on campus. This is the general belief by almost all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Perhaps that is why character assessment is never done in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

At any rate, on graduation, successfully without recorded blemish, it is then assumed that the individual student has behaved well and has done satisfactorily good academically. Hence, he or she is usually awarded a university degree as a good person in character and learning. Subsequently, they would then proceed into the world as ambassadors of the tertiary institution that produced them. It is evident and noteworthy that the period, say ten years before independence, up to the mid-nineteen eighties, Nigerian tertiary institutions produced top grade graduates in almost all fields of human endeavours that were respected nationally and internationally. Then university education became the dream of every Nigerian youth.

Recently, however, the nation experienced gradual decline of the quality of higher education bedeviled by poor policy, policy summersaults, poor funding of the sector and most importantly mal-adjusted students suffering from bad character which are non-assessed. Since character and learning must go together in producing useful graduates, while only learning is being assessed, correspondingly, the conduct of many recent graduates from many Nigerian tertiary institutions in terms of personal character, social conduct and even competences in the disciplines they read, has left much to be desired. This is indicative of the obvious decline of the quality of tertiary education being imparted into the modern graduates. To buttress this point, it can be said that aside from the fact that most are incapable of taking initiative and exhibiting creativity, they also can hardly think out of the box to create jobs to fend for themselves. Consequently, most of the graduates now roam the streets daily armed with degrees that they can hardly defend, while looking for white-collar jobs in such labour-saturated markets as government and private business establishments. A few that could have been absorbed into naturally occurring vacancies because of staff attrition, could not secure such vacancies due to poor character disposition and inability to earn peoples' empathy.

The failure of the modern graduates to gain employment and the pressure of survival demands as well as the penchant to acquire the good things of life, make the morally weak ones to succumb to crime commission of varying degrees all due to lack of strong character formation during the course of training in the university. In the recent past, say, some thirty to forty years ago, when learning was ensured to go with maturity in obeisance to Piaget theory (Kendra, 2020), Nigeria produced resourceful graduates who were sought after frantically within and outside the country. Ironically, in recent times, say some fifteen to

twenty years ago, what went wrong with quality of tertiary education in the country could not be immediately discerned. However, several commentators and researchers have attempted to investigate the causes of graduate failure to key into the productive economic sector of the nation (Otonko, 2012). President Muhammadu Buhari's call on NUC to review university curriculum in Nigeria was echoed by *The Sun* editorial on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018 (The Sun, 2018). It posited that the university curriculum is out of tune with the labour market demands as the editorial supported the call. Eneh and Eneh (2015), in their own view, are of the opinion that initially university was aimed at providing the requirement of industries, commerce and society. These aspirations were met in the early years of the universities but not today.

The curriculum content and relevance of university education did not change with time and space in terms of social and economic dynamics of the globalized world. Hence our university curriculum is hardly relevant to the modern times. The consequences are that the graduates being churned out of our tertiary institutions cannot fit into the current massive available jobs in our job-markets.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students of tertiary institutions are believed and expected to be above board when it comes to impeccable personal qualities, moral and ethical conduct as well as self-discipline. It is this presumption that made tertiary institutions nationwide to skip character assessment of students and concentrate on thorough academic assessment through conduct of assignments, continuous assessment tests and examinations. Initially, a little before independence up to about twenty years after independence, the presumption came out positive. But after scraping of the two years Higher School Certificate (HSC) studies, which served as tertiary institution's age-gap filler preparatory to university entry, the floodgates for underage juveniles to access university education was opened. This action served as a turning point from admitting matured candidates into tertiary institutions, to admitting mostly immature juveniles to enjoy unfettered freedom which they cannot eventually manage but abuse.

Consequently, the tertiary institutions' campuses started experiencing myriads of crises that boarder on, indiscipline, moral and ethical decadence, cultism, exam malpractices, conflict, and violence. Sometimes the crises lead to incessant closure of the institutions. The vogue of fomenting trouble on campuses became fashionable and the incidence was reinforced by the students' belief that their conduct and behaviours are not assessed and that they cannot be held accountable for their bizarre actions as long as they are passing their exams. However, learning must be juxtaposed with character for studies to be meaningful and fruitful to produce quality graduates.

Sequel to the assertion above, therefore, learning without character, or character without learning amounts to futility. The bulk of graduates being churned out of our tertiary institutions these days are massively lacking in character and the situation is so bad that even learning and skills acquisition are being adversely affected by the attendant production of poor-quality graduates. It is against this background that this paper intends to seek a solution to the problem.

## **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Educational leadership practices in tertiary institutions and the effect of students' non-assessment and evaluation.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the scope of educational leadership practices and goal achievement in respect of students' assessment and evaluation.
2. To examine the adequacy of the scope of tertiary educational leadership practices vis-à-vis character assessment and evaluation.
3. To determine the challenges and prospects of the tertiary educational leadership practices as regards assessment and evaluation.
4. To identify the strategies for improvement.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. To what extent has the current educational leadership practices and goal achievement covered full tertiary students' assessment and evaluation?
2. How adequate is the scope of tertiary educational leadership practices in terms of students' assessment and evaluation?
3. What are the challenges and prospects facing tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation?
4. What are the strategies for improvement of tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation?

## **METHOD**

The research design employed for this study is a descriptive survey research. A survey research investigates the existing situation and attitude based on information collected directly from the people involved. This kind of research method is mostly concerned with how, what, and why questions. It interprets and establishes the course of actions. Gay, (2005) defined descriptive research as a process of data collection in order to test hypothesis or to provide answers to research questions. The area chosen for this research is Kaduna and Zaria metropolises of Kaduna State, since the two cities are known to have many tertiary institutions clustered in each one of them. They are among the few cities in Nigeria where an individual can pass through all the levels of education, from kindergarten to university without moving elsewhere. The target population of this study comprises of selected tertiary institutions in Kaduna and Zaria metropolises with a total number of one hundred and twenty (120) people, from institutions' management cadre, ordinary lecturers and even students. In composing the sample of the study, the researcher adopted purposive sampling techniques, followed by random sampling from some selected institutions in Kaduna and Zaria metropolises. The sample size for the study is 120 respondents. For this study, a self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections namely: A and B. Section A is concerned with the bio data of the respondents while section B was used in answering the questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale labelled with, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) each carrying marks of: (5), (4), (3), (2), and (1) respectively, with a total number of 22 items. The questionnaire was validated by three online research experts domiciled with Research Gate platform. Lecturers in research departments of our local institutions could not be reached due to COVID-19

pandemic. Useful corrections were made, which led to re-construction of the words that were corrected. For reliability, before the actual data collection, pilot study of instruments was done in one of the institutions in Kaduna based on convenience sampling involving five (5) university management staff, twenty (20) lecturers and two (2) students. This group of people did not participate in the final study. The Pilot study enabled the researchers to test the reliability of the instruments. The questionnaires were given to the management staff, lecturers, and students at different times for each group within the period of the study. The researcher used pilot-study test to identify uncertainty and made all corrections during the final data collection. The result of the pilot-study indicated that the instrument was reliable. The researchers administered the questionnaires to the sampled groups in the selected institutions in Kaduna and Zaria metropolises with the help of some of the author's students in Air Force Institute of Technology AFIT Kaduna, who served as research assistants. Management staff, lecturers and students were given the questionnaires to tick their best options at their own time bearing in mind that they are enlightened enough to handle the questionnaire and the researchers collected them at a later convenient time. In this study descriptive statistics using frequency distribution, tables, percentages, and mean were used for computation.

## RESULTS

The respondents were required to indicate their age, gender and occupation as a source of information, the summary of respondents' responses to item of their background information is shown in tables 4.1 and 4.2 respectively. The tables are numbered in conformity with the standard research report sections where results happened to be at chapter four.

### Section A. Bio Data

Table 4.1 Distribution of Respondents by Age

| Age              | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|------------|----------------|
| 15-25 years      | 5          | 4.2%           |
| 26 – 36 years    | 55         | 45.8%          |
| 37 – 47 years    | 45         | 37.5%          |
| 48 years - above | 15         | 12.5%          |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>120</b> | <b>100%</b>    |

Table 4.1 showed that (4.2%) of the respondents are within the age range of 15-25 years, (45.8%) of the respondents are within the range of 26-36 years, (37.5%) of the respondents are within the range of 37-47 years and (12.5 %) are within the age range of 48 years and above.

Table 4.2. Distribution of respondents based on occupation

| Occupation    | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|------------|----------------|
| School Manger | 15         | 12.5%          |
| Lecturer      | 100        | 83.3%          |
| Student       | 5          | 4.2%           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>120</b> | <b>100%</b>    |

Table 4.2 Showed that (12.5 %) of the respondents were school managers, (83.3%) of the respondents were lecturers constituting the majority, and (4.2%) of the respondents were students constituting the minority of the sampled population.

**Research Question 1:** To what extent has the current educational leadership practices and goal achievement covered full tertiary students' assessment and evaluation?

To answer this research question, frequency and mean were modified as shown in the table below.

**Table 4.3 Distribution of respondents for the extent of coverage of full assessment and evaluation of tertiary institutions' students.**

| Item                                                                                                                                         | SA  | A   | UD | D  | SD | Freq | No. | Mean | Remarks  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|------|-----|------|----------|
| a. The current educational leadership practices fully assesses students' academic performance.                                               | 380 | 120 | 9  | 12 | 5  | 526  | 120 | 4.38 | Accepted |
| b. Students' character assessment is not practically or implicitly done during the process of teaching students on the campuses.             | 255 | 220 | 12 | 10 | 5  | 502  | 120 | 4.18 | Accepted |
| c. Students' academic performance is being fully evaluated and each student graded to know the quality of his/her certificate to be awarded. | 310 | 196 | 9  | 2  | 5  | 522  | 120 | 4.35 | Accepted |
| d. Each student's character is not evaluated to determine the level of his or her personal qualities.                                        | 275 | 216 | 6  | 8  | 5  | 510  | 120 | 4.25 | Accepted |
| e. Departmental or Faculty comments on students' character is not reflected on the result scripts of graduating students.                    | 175 | 244 | 45 | 21 | 2  | 354  | 120 | 4.06 | Accepted |

Table 4.3 showed that all the given variables have a mean rating above 3 points; 1<sup>st</sup> variable is highly rated by 4.38. While the 5th variable have the least mean but still above 3 points which is 4.06, all five variables were accepted.

**Research Question 2:** How adequate is the scope of tertiary educational leadership practices in terms of students' assessment and evaluation?

**Table 4.4 Distribution of respondents by adequacy of the scope of tertiary institution's students' assessment and evaluation**

| Item                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | SA  | A   | UD | D  | SD | Freq | No. | Mean | Remarks  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|------|-----|------|----------|
| a. The current pattern of exam setting in tertiary institutions is to test only the cognitive capacity of students.                                                                                                    | 120 | 216 | 51 | 30 | 10 | 427  | 120 | 3.56 | Accepted |
| b. The psychomotor aspect of the learning domain is not adequately covered by the pattern of examination being conducted in tertiary institutions.                                                                     | 95  | 92  | 84 | 40 | 30 | 341  | 120 | 2.84 | Rejected |
| c. The affective aspect of learning domain which modifies and moderates student's character and social values is not covered by the pattern of assessment and evaluation being conducted in our tertiary institutions. | 285 | 136 | 15 | 28 | 10 | 474  | 120 | 3.95 | Accepted |
| d. Students are hardly aware of any effort being made in their institutions about their character assessment.                                                                                                          | 175 | 132 | 66 | 32 | 14 | 419  | 120 | 3.49 | Accepted |
| e. Sports and physical fitness of students is never assessed in Nigerian tertiary institutions.                                                                                                                        | 150 | 116 | 78 | 36 | 17 | 397  | 120 | 3.31 | Accepted |

Table 4.4 showed the distribution of respondents by the adequacy of the scope of tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation. The result showed that all but one variable had a mean rating above 3 points. The highest variable is the 3<sup>rd</sup> variable rating 3.95 while the lowest variable is the 2<sup>nd</sup> variable rating 2.84. This means that the scope of tertiary institutions' assessment and evaluation of students is not adequate. The second variable was scored low perhaps due to respondents' belief that polytechnics and teachers' colleges of education are teaching some practical lessons, hence the disagreement with the statement of the variable.

**Research Question 3:**What are the challenges and prospects facing tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation?

**Table 4.5 Distribution of respondents by the challenges**

| Item                                                                                                                              | SA  | A   | UD | D  | SD | Freq | No. | Mean | Remarks  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|------|-----|------|----------|
| a. Management's conservative attitude and resistance to change.                                                                   | 430 | 120 | 6  | 0  | 2  | 558  | 120 | 4.65 | Accepted |
| b. Poor funding can affect logistics requirement of instituting character assessment and evaluation.                              | 405 | 136 | 12 | 0  | 1  | 554  | 120 | 4.62 | Accepted |
| c. Susceptibility of the assessment and evaluation event to be subjective rather than objective.                                  | 220 | 196 | 12 | 18 | 14 | 460  | 120 | 3.83 | Accepted |
| d. Non-assessment of students' character on campus is responsible for the loose moral and ethical behaviour of most of them.      | 345 | 160 | 9  | 6  | 5  | 525  | 120 | 4.38 | Accepted |
| e. Conscious of non-evaluation of their character, encourages students' engagement in cultism and unprovoked outrages on campuses | 195 | 200 | 12 | 24 | 15 | 446  | 120 | 3.72 | Accepted |
| f. Admission of immature students is impacting negatively on moral, ethics and discipline on campus.                              | 295 | 180 | 9  | 12 | 7  | 503  | 120 | 4.19 | Accepted |
| g. The incumbent students will resist the institution of character assessment in their faculties and departments.                 | 300 | 140 | 9  | 20 | 12 | 481  | 120 | 4.01 | Accepted |

Table 4.5 showed the distribution of respondents by challenges and prospects facing tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation. The result showed that all variables had a mean rating above 3.00. The 1<sup>st</sup> variable was considered as the highest rated by 4.65. While the 5<sup>th</sup> variable was the lowest rated by 3.72. This means they were accepted as the challenges facing tertiary institutions in assessing and evaluating students.

**Research Question 4:** What are the strategies for improving tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation?

**Table 4.6 Distribution of respondents by strategies for improvement**

| Item                                                                                                                                                                                                    | SA  | A   | UD | D  | SD | Freq | No. | Mean | Remarks  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|------|-----|------|----------|
| a. Review of tertiary institutions' policy of assessment and evaluation framework                                                                                                                       | 295 | 180 | 9  | 14 | 6  | 504  | 120 | 4.20 | Accepted |
| b. Insertion of clause covering character and academic scope of assessment in students' admission brochure/ letter/ handbook as a pre-condition for admission.                                          | 360 | 160 | 6  | 4  | 4  | 534  | 120 | 4.45 | Accepted |
| c. Establishment of a 2-way assessment practice, i.e. teachers to assess students' character and students to comment on teachers' performance.                                                          | 350 | 164 | 12 | 4  | 3  | 533  | 120 | 4.44 | Accepted |
| d. At least 4 staff ( class teacher, unit head, departmental head and faculty head) to comment on each student and out of the four none should differ more than 20% off the central view of the others. | 410 | 104 | 12 | 4  | 6  | 536  | 120 | 4.47 | Accepted |
| e. The assessment of character should not start in retrospect.                                                                                                                                          | 270 | 208 | 6  | 12 | 6  | 502  | 120 | 4.18 | Accepted |

Table 4.6 shows the distribution of respondents by strategies for improving tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation. The result showed that all variables had a mean rating above 3 points while the strategies for improving tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation variable 4 is considered the highly rated variable which is rating 4.47. And the low rated variable is the 5<sup>th</sup> with a rating of 4.18.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are discussed based on the research questions raised on page 5 of this paper. The findings on table 4.3 showed that the variable statement of items a, b, c and d which are: leadership practices currently full assess students' academic performances, students' character assessment is not practically or implicitly done, students' academic performance is being fully evaluated and each student graded, while each students' character is not being evaluated to determine the level of his or her personal qualities, departmental or faculty comments on students' character is not being reflected on the result scripts of graduating students were all confirmed to be accepted by respondents. Therefore, the extent

of full coverage of assessment and evaluation of students of tertiary institutions were high for academic performance and very low for character development. Hence, this study posits that non-assessment of students' character is contributing to progressive moral and ethical decadence on campuses in Nigeria. The findings on table 4.4 showed that variable statements at items a-c which are: exam setting is aimed at testing only the cognitive capacity of students, the psychomotor aspect of learning domain is inadequately covered, the affective learning domain is not covered by the exam setting pattern, students are hardly aware of any effort being made to assess their character, sports and physical assessment of students is never done, were all accepted as true. This is a confirmation of the inadequacy of current pattern of exam being set to assess students, and it is fully covering only the cognitive domain of education to the exclusion of the affective and psychomotor domains. The findings on table 4.5 showed that all the items were accepted as the challenges facing character assessment and evaluation which are: conservative attitude and resistance to change by management, poor funding of logistics requirements for students' assessment and evaluation, susceptibility of the assessment to be subjective, and moral and ethical decadence due to non-assessment of character. The findings on table 4.6 showed that all items can be adopted as strategies for improving tertiary institutions' students' assessment and evaluation which are: review of tertiary institutions' policy of assessment and evaluation framework, Insertion of a clause covering character and academic scope of assessment in students' admission brochure/ letter/ handbook as a pre-condition for admission, establishment of a 2-way assessment practice, i.e. teachers to assess students' character and students to comment on teachers' performance, at least 4 staff ( class teacher, unit head, departmental head and faculty head) to comment on each student and out of the four none should differ more than 20% off the central view of the others, and the assessment of character should not start in retrospect.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were established.

1. The extent of students' assessment and evaluation focus only on academic performance to the exclusion of character assessment.
2. The current pattern of exam setting is grossly inadequate because it is testing only the cognitive domain of education to the exclusion of affective and psychomotor domains.
3. Conservative attitude and resistance to change by management is a major challenge to the introduction of students' character assessment and evaluation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
4. Review of tertiary institutions' policy of students' assessment and evaluation framework to include character assessment will go a long way in addressing crises induced by indiscipline, moral and ethical decadence on Nigerian tertiary institutions' campuses.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made towards the introduction of character assessment of tertiary institutions' students in order to improve students' level of discipline, moral and ethical uprightness as well as physical fitness. It is to also make true the claim that "university degrees awarded in character and learning".

1. Government should consider reviewing the policy of students' assessment and evaluation framework to include character assessment.

2. The introduction of the policy of character assessment of students should be included in the school brochure and or school handbook and acceptance of the assessment be made pre-condition for admission.
3. The assessment of character should not start in retrospect. It should start with freshman students when it commences.
4. Students should be given the opportunity to also comment on their teachers' performances as a report to management.

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