

Imperatives Of Paradigm Shift From ‘Assessment-Of-Learning’ To ‘Assessment-For-Learning’ To Ensure Quality Higher Education And National Development In Nigeria

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Abstract: The future and quality of higher education in Nigeria has become a topical issue that is susceptible to different perception among educationists, even ‘semi-educated’ people inclusive. Truly, it is a phenomenon that actually deserves concerns raised from different quarters. However, as much as Nigerians discuss a problem, less they analyse it, and least they attempt to seek solution(s) to such a problem. This paper therefore discussed the imperatives of paradigm shift in the assessment practices in Nigerian tertiary institutions with a view to create awareness among academics at tertiary institutions on the need for assessment for learning. Also, it attempted to establish the link among assessment, learning, quality higher education and national development. Hopefully, if academics in tertiary institutions (comprising the instructors, technologists, and lecturers) have knowledge and skills in ‘assessment for learning’, and adopt it in the teaching-learning process, the quality of graduates turn-out in Nigerian tertiary institutions shall improve. In this way, the quality of our graduates shall be the one that will meet the challenges of twenty-first century for national development.

Keywords: Assessment, National development, Paradigm shift, Quality higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

Assessment of learning has for long been the practice in Nigerian education system with higher education inclusive. As defined by Earl (2006), assessment of learning refers to assessment that becomes public and results in statements about how well student are learning, i.e. performance grading. It involves taking decisions that may have everlasting effect on the future of students. As earlier defined, Assessment of Learning (AoL) is the process of collecting and interpreting evidence for the purpose of summarizing learning at a given point in time, to make judgments about the quality of student

learning on the basis of established criteria, and to assign a value to represent that quality (Earl, 2003, p.144).

This assessment is characterised by the followings; letter grades, comparison of student achievement with stated standards, and summation in nature. Hence, it takes place at the end of the learning unit. Unlike AoL, Assessment for Learning (AfL) is an approach to teaching and learning that creates feedback that is used to enhance students learning and thereby promote students’ performance. Earl (2003) precisely defined AfL as the ongoing process of gathering and interpreting evidence about student learning for the purpose of determining where students are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there.

Higher education in Nigeria is often referred to as tertiary education. As contained in the National Policy on Education (2013 Edition), tertiary education is described as education given to recipients after Post Basic Education generally received in institution like universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and other specialised institutions. The Policy highlighted the goals of tertiary education under sub-section 81 of section 5. And as can be observed in the first goal of tertiary education is "that higher education shall contribute to national development through high level manpower training". The policy statement of this national document does not merely emphasis the synergy between higher education and national development but it vehemently recognises higher education as a tool for actualizing and sustaining national development. This is in consonance with the opening statement in NPE on early education which states that education has been adopted as an instrument per excellence for the attainment to national development (NPE, 2013).

This further explains its (education) relationship with the larger society popularly referred to as "the synergy between town and gown". When painstakingly perused, the last two functions are crucial to national development. Therefore, national development is largely hinged on the quality of higher education institutions graduates supplied to the labour market and generation of new ideas, and techniques of production for improvement in all ramifications. It is based on this background that the assessment of student leaning should be given adequate attention. This paper is interested in providing awareness on AFL needed in the attainment of quality higher education in Nigeria.

PARADIGM SHIFT

Literarily, paradigm shift as a concept means an attempt to make a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions. It was credited to an American physicist and philosopher, Thomas S. Kuhn (1922-1996) who used it to mean replacing a usual way of thinking about or doing something with a new and different way. Westcott (2018), after narrating the etymology of paradigm shift, concluded that it occurs when one paradigm is replaced by another such as it occurred when Aristotle's physics gave way to that of Galileo and Newton which subsequently give way to Einsteinium physics. In this paper, a parading shift does not indicate a jettisoning of the old practice but a slightly departure from it to pave way for the new one because of its inherent benefits. AoL can never be removed from the practice of education system; however, for instance, AfL should be used often to enhance learning among students. It is thus, a paradigm shift from AoL to AfL.

ASSESSMENT

In education, assessment generally covers all methods or tools employed by educators usually teachers to evaluate measure and document among others, the learning and progress made by students, the skill they have acquired and knowledge gains, learning difficulties, readiness and students' education needs. Ifeakor (2015), defined assessment as a systematic process used in determining the extent to which a

teacher is able to impart on students the stipulated instructional objectives. And with particular reference to higher education, it is a process which indicates the magnitude to which the skills that a course of study is designed to foster in learners is attained. Assessment is, therefore, useful to the teachers, students, institutions and other agencies for its feedback which could serve many purposes at a time.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Ogai (2003) cited in Ebeh (2015) sees national development as a gradual manifestation of positive changes in the economic, industrial, political, social, cultural and administrative life of a country. It is therefore concerned about quality improvement in the various sectors of our national life such as the political, ethical, socio-psychological, and economic spheres of national existence, which combined, to define and assure quality and productive existence for the citizens of a country. Similarly, Umoh (2010) contended that national development encompasses all-round, well-balance progress and self-sustaining expansion and provision of individual aspects as well as sectorial facilities. Hence, it involves more than provision of social amenities.

National development is an all-encompassing concept for its broadness and comprehensiveness. It includes all aspects of a nation's development such as: economy, politics and governance, social institutions, physical structures, as well as national values and morality. It should not be confined to milieu of social and economic aspects only.

II. QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Higher institutions of learning are charged with the responsibility of ensuring national development through production of skilled manpower. For instance, the Universities in Europe are to contribute knowledge for the economy and making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world (Gornitzka, et. al., 2007). Similarly, in Nigeria, tertiary institutions are expected to be centres for generating knowledge needed for national development

Quality higher education would be realised if higher education is being implemented as stated in the National Policy on Education. Nigerian higher education would be regarded as a qualitative one, if two criteria are met; the graduates turn out should be able to contribute meaningfully to development of the country, and they should be internationally competent for labour markets. Addo (2010) noted that higher education in African continent remains an indispensable agency for the attainment of national development, however, the most pathetic aspect is that it had been accorded seemly much less policy and funding since late 1980s. There is inherent neglect of higher education not only by the governments, but also by donor agencies and international multinational organisations.

There is a strong connection between the quality or a nation's manpower and its level of national development. In line with the goals of higher education in Nigeria, the

manpower training that would translate into national development remains canonical one. Adebisi (2014) reiterated that the quality of manpower of a nation is a determinant of its national development, hence to have a quality and adequate manpower needed by a nation for its national development, higher educational institutions must be given a desirable attention. To support this, Addo (2010) said the establishment of higher education institution is essentially for capacity building which is meant to prepare the recipients as manpower needed for national development.

Quality higher education is a ladder to the attainment of national development. For instance, as contained in the NPE, University Education is expected to make optimum contribution to national development. The students should be exposed to relevant future working environment even while in school through training programmes such as: Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme, Teaching Practice, and Internship. Addo (2010) noted that manpower development serves as a catalyst to national development.

Higher education has a critical function in national development, though in Nigeria, it has not fully played its role in this regard (Kingdom & Maekae, 2013). As observed by former Nigerian president Obasanjo, education is expected to promote the culture of productivity through discovering of creative potentials among individuals to improve on the existing skill and techniques of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing their efficiency in personal and societal efforts (Kingdom & Maekae, 2013).

III. USING ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

It is important to put searchlight into what could be regarded as antecedents of AfL. Lau (2013) traced its antecedent to Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism which eventually led to the use of authentic assessment. Assessment is "authentic" when it equates to what students will be facing in everyday life or future workplace after their formal education in schools. Dewey's work focused on the learning experience and the thinking involved in the doing. It is the unity of instruction, assessment and real life experiences, rather than just the "doing" as many people misconstrue the proposition. This unity of instruction, assessment and real life experiences is underpinned by Dewey's view of education. Rawlusyk (2018) however observed that there is a continual expression of concern that the assessment methods used at higher institutions are not linked to students' learning.

Therefore, the benefits of shifting from AoL to AfL that have been exhaustively underlined in the literature (Jin-Jy & Carmel, 2017). Rawlusyk (2018) noted with evidences that though there are many articles written on assessment practices that promote learning, lecturers at tertiary institutions seem to continue relying on paper and pencil examinations to determine students' knowledge. Whereas, the goals of higher education require effective and functional learning which AfL can adequately take care of. These goals as pointed out by Ifeakor (2015) are more of affective than cognitive and psychomotor domains. She then cautioned that assessment of students' learning at higher education level must cater the

domains of cognitive, affective and psychomotor in all disciplines. To cap it all, in addition to the three domains, the inclusion of life-long learning skills must not be left out. That is why as a departure from the old practice, AfL as its name implies, is believed to be helpful to enhance learning among students as it is meant to assist both learners and teachers. Adeyemi-Adedoyin (2017) described it as a process by which teachers make use of information from the process to adjust their teaching strategies while students are equally able to adjust their learning strategies. It is further described as an ongoing process of determining students' learning progress as well as giving teachers valid impetus on what to do for the realization of instructional objectives.

In sum, in line with the purpose an assessment (in whatever form) is meant to serve, AfL also known as formative assessment directly influences students' learning by reinforcing the connections between assessment and instruction (Adeyemi-Adedoyin, 2017).

At whatever level of education, assessment if properly implemented can be used to promote quality of learning among students. Supporting this assertion, Strakova (n. d.) had earlier opined that assessment is an integral part of any meaningful learning process. Effort to provide good assessment requires that assessment methods should be considered along with learning outcomes during the planning stage. Reflecting on the goals of higher education across the globe, higher education aimed to:

- ✓ Contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- ✓ Provide high quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- ✓ Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market.

However, according to FRN (2013), for tertiary (often referred to as higher) education to pursue the above stated goals successfully, it has to be through the following:

- ✓ Quality teaching and learning;
- ✓ Generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy;
- ✓ Provision of a more practical based curriculum relevant to the needs of the labour market.

Looking at the goals of higher education stated above, and considering the primary purpose of AfL (as an ongoing process to strengthen interaction between teaching and learning), AfL is meant to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching process including strategies adopted as they both respond to information it provides. It therefore remains a veritable tool for actualising the above stated goals of higher education. It is capable of doing so because, it occurs throughout the teaching-learning process. In order to effectively use AfL in higher education, these are five pertinent questions a teacher is expected to put forward while planning assessment for learning are: Why Assess? Assess What? What Methods? How to Ensure Quality Assessment? How to Use Information from Assessment? The table below explains each of the questions.

| Question | Intended purpose |
|-------------------|---|
| Why Assess? | To enable teachers to determine next steps in advancing student learning |
| Assess What? | Each student's progress and learning needs in relation to the curricular outcomes |
| What Methods? | A range of methods in different modes that make students' skills and understanding visible |
| Ensuring Quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy and consistency of observations and interpretations of student learning • Clear, detailed learning expectations • Accurate detailed notes for descriptive feedback to each student |
| Using Information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide each student with accurate descriptive feedback to further his or her learning • Differentiate instruction by continually checking where each student is in relation to the curricular outcomes • Provide parents or guardians with descriptive feedback about student learning and ideas for support |

Source: Adopted from Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006)

Figure 1: Summary of Planning Assessment for Learning

The synergy between the goals of higher education and AfL if carefully observed gives a clear indication that the latter would lead to the attainment of the former.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can therefore be deduced from the above that the hallmark of higher education is acquisition of knowledge, value and skills required for national development and peaceful co-existence. Therefore, all higher educational institutions must strive to live up to the expectation of turning out competent and skillful manpower needed for national development. In line with this, assessment is an integral and indispensable part of any meaningful learning. Teaching, no matter the amount of effort expended on it, will only be meaningful when learning takes place.

In other words, effective learning will bring out acquisition of knowledge, values and skills required of functional graduates that will constitute manpower which will subsequently lead to attainment of national development and in order to realise and foster this type of learning, AfL becomes an imperative tool. In fact, the adoption of AfL strategy would help in no small way to solve the problem created through practice of one-time assessment in the form of end-of semester examination. In practice, AfL helps in diagnosing students' learning difficulties, provides feedback loop for the remedy of teaching-learning problems, and lastly, it fosters learning among students.

It is, therefore, recommended that teachers at higher educational institutions should adopt the use AfL, so that Nigerian higher education will fulfill its core mandate of training manpower needed for national development. Though

AfL has its own challenges, if adopted, those challenges will unfold naturally and knowledge to surmounting them will equally come. Our teachers need not to be skeptical about the power and inherent benefits of AfL in enhancing both teaching and learning.

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