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SOME INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF UNDERGRADUATES’ ATTITUDE TO CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: Implications for policy, qualitative education and counselling

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Introduction

Periodic assessment is an integral part of education process. It provides opportunity for teachers and learners to assess learning outcomes with a view to adjusting methods and improving academic achievement. It also provides the required basis for admission, placement, promotion, demotion or repetition and at the end certification of learners. If there is no form of assessment in education, the process would be marred by obscurity and it would be very difficult to classify the products of the system (Omoifo, 1998). Periodic assessment makes it possible to know the direction of students' performance and to determine the direction of change of students' attitude (Alutu & Alutu, 2007).

The system is particularly good for qualitative education as it provides more opportunities for the educators to take students to task on what they are learning periodically. Assessment of students' performances in such exercises can be graded to form part of the final examination scores. In fact, the inherent problems of the old one short end of semester, session or program assessment which makes integration of such field exercises into assessment scores difficult necessitated the introduction of the continuous assessment system (Obe, 1998). The obvious advantages of continuous assessment led to its recognition in the national policy on education and its integration into all levels of education in Nigeria (Ifamuyiwa, 2006). It is a system which gives room for a systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance oriented approach in educational assessment (Obe, 1998). It thus provides ample opportunity to incorporate practical exercises and reduce incidences of examination malpractices which has remained the bane of educational quality in Nigeria (Okubanjo, 2006). No doubt, one of the benefits of continuous assessment is that it has the tendency to motivate students to participate more in practical exercises, study more frequently in order to foster long term retention of facts as opposed to last minute cramming for seasonal or final examinations (Obe, 1980).

Unfortunately, after decades of its implementation, continuous assessment is yet to yield the expected dividends for the Nigerian education system especially with regards to human kinetics education in the nation’s tertiary institutions (Ifamuyiwa, 2006). The reason for this is still far-fetched. Could it be that there are some institutional factors which have made the benefits of continuous assessment almost entirely elusive? Alutu & Alutu (2007) observed that incessant strikes and closure of educational institutions erode quality of teaching and learning. Omoifo (1998) found that many students lacked the will to achieve and prefer to explore unorthodox means of passing examinations. The problem is rather that of lack of professional ethics among academics (Alutu & Alutu, 2007), and the persistence of corrupt practices within the education system (Egbochuku, 2002). The goal of education cannot be achieved due to defective teaching and adoption of wrong approach by teachers (Koleoso, 2001). Many students have low sense of efficacy (Mabekoje & Hassan, 2007) and they prefer to explore unwholesome ways to pass examinations. It is amazing to think that these problems obstruct effective implementation of continuous assessment at the university level. Therefore, this study investigated the extent to which the perceived defects in education system correlates with undergraduates’ attitude to
Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were raised and answered in this study:

(i) What is the combined influence of all the identified institutional factors on undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment?

(ii) What is the relative contribution of the identified institutional factors to undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed descriptive survey research design in which validated questionnaires were used for data collection from a representative sample of the study population.

Sample

Participants for the study comprised of 600 undergraduates (Males = 300 (50%); females = 300 (50%) randomly drawn from two universities in Ogun state, Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique along gender divide was employed in selecting the sample. The age range of participants was 18-26 years with a mean age of 20.04 years and standard deviation of 2.18.

Instrumentation

Two instruments developed and validated by the researchers were used in the study. The first was the Continuous Assessment Attitude Scale (CAAS) which has 12 items to be rated on a 4-point Likert type scale. Higher scores (30 and above) indicates poor attitude to continuous assessment, lower scores (1-16) indicates positive attitude while (17-29) indicates indifference to continuous assessment. The tests re-test reliability yielded ($r = .88$; 2-week interval) and it has internal consistency (alpha = .79). The second instrument, Institutional and Personal Factors Scale (IPFS) has 18 items rated on a Yes or No basis. It has a test re-test reliability of 0.91 and internal consistency of 0.86 on Cronbach alpha.

Procedure

The two instruments were administered one after the other by the researchers with the aid of four research assistants. The research assistants were trained before the commencement of the study. Administration of the two instruments lasted 40 minutes on average.

Data Analysis

The multiple regression analysis was used in analyzing data to determine the predictive potency of the identified institutional factors and the personal factors in human kinetic students’ attitude to continuous assessment.
Table 1 above revealed that the combination of institutional factors (defective teaching, class congestion, unstable academic calendar, indiscriminate award of marks and corruption) in predicting undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment yielded a coefficient of multiple regression $R$ of 0.682 and multiple $R^2$ = .465. This implies that the institutional factors combined accounted for 46.5% of the variance in undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment. The table also showed F-ratio of 8.286 significant at 0.05 levels.

Table 2 above showed that all the five factors are potent predictors of undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment. The most potent factor was unstable academic calendar ($B= .867, t= 2.936, P< 0.05$), followed by class congestion ($B= .743, t=1.822; P< 0.05$), followed by indiscriminate award of marks ($B= .731, t=1.442; P<0.05$), followed by corruption ($B= .341; t =1.431; P< 0.05$). The least potent factor was defective teaching ($B=.236; t= 1.106, P < 0.05$). Thus, each of the identified institutional factors made varying contributions to undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment.

Discussion

The finding that all the identified institutional factors made combined influence on undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment is indeed plausible. Students tend to show negative attitude to continuous assessment when they are aware of these defects. They tend to evade tests, take CA with
levity and absent at will when they are aware that tests are not often marked, scores are awarded indiscriminately, marks could be obtained through dubious means and teaching is even defective. This finding further corroborates the notion that several problems militate against the effectiveness of continuous assessment practices in Nigeria (Obe, 1980; Onabanjo, 2006).

It is instructive that unstable academic calendar constitutes the most potent predictor of undergraduates’ attitude to continuous assessment. Fluctuations in academic calendar could call for unnecessary rush and leave no time for thorough continuous assessment. This supports the report that incessant strikes and closure of educational institutions erode quality of teaching and learning (Alutu & Alutu, 2007). The finding that class congestion, indiscriminate award of scores, corruption and defective teaching in that order contribute to undergraduates’ unwholesome attitude to continuous assessment further reveals some of the evils plaguing the Nigerian education system. They are part of the problems obstructing effective implementation of continuous assessment in Nigerian schools (Ifamuyiwa, 2006). The present finding lends credence to Omoifo (1998) who found that many students lacked the will to achieve but instead look for unorthodox means to excel in examinations.

Implications for Policy, Qualitative Education and Counseling

The findings of this study portend that university authority should device appropriate ways to ensure that continuous assessment practices are standardized. There should be build in monitoring exercises and appropriate sanctions for violators of laid down standards.

Tertiary education in particular needs to encourage standard continuous assessment practices. Continuous assessment should focus on clear demonstration of skills and knowledge acquired during lectures. Emphasis on practical works as continuous assessment would aid skills acquisition and lecturers would find grading of such works less tedious than written works especially in the face of class-congestion.

The need for greater emphasis on guidance and counseling services for lecturers and students becomes more glaring with the findings of this study. Value clarification, cognitive restructuring and morale-boosting should be emphasized in all academic counseling programs meant for staff and students in Nigerian universities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Undergraduates showed negative attitude to continuous assessment because of the identified institutional factors in the university system. It is therefore necessary for all the stakeholders in education especially, administrators, lecturers and counselors to device appropriate means to remove the various defects. Adequate provision of facilities and better condition of service should be ensured to guarantee stability of academic calendar, reduce class congestion, promote ethical standards, facilitate effective teaching and remove corrupt practices. It is hoped that effective implementation of these recommendations would ameliorate the defects in the education system and facilitate effective implementation of continuous assessment in the university system.

References

undergraduates; a case study of University of Benin. The Counsellor, 23, 183-188.


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