

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

The study basically examined the students' understanding of the concept of Portfolio Assessment as well as problems of using portfolios as a method of assessment. One thousand (1000) students were involved, while three hundred (300s) served as sample size for the study. The study used Alpha Cronbach Reliability Coefficient to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument. 0.951 was obtained for student's questionnaire. This result confirmed that the instrument was reliable for collection of data. The study showed that portfolios were mostly used as folders. The findings indicated that students did not understand the concept of portfolio assessment which comprises rubric, guidelines; self-reflection and portfolio model sheets. The finding of the study also identified problems of using assessment portfolios which included time consumption, consistent preparation and planning.

**Keywords:** Perception, Assessment portfolios, Analytic and Holistic rubrics

### Introduction

Teaching and learning play important roles in the life of human society. Education has been the means of development socially, economically, politically, morally and technologically. To achieve these, public education has been shifting to a standard or outcomes based on performance oriented systems. Within such systems, the most basic purpose of all education is students' learning and assessment, and the primary purpose of all assessment is to support learning in some fashion. The support is rendered through assessment which can improve the instruction, teaching method and assessment. For instance the assessment reform that began in the 1980s in North America has had numerous impacts. Most significantly, it has changed the way educators think about students' capabilities, the nature of quality in learning as well as what can serve as assessment. During the educational reformation, the use of portfolios as mode of assessment has gained a lot of interest (Davies and Le Mahieu, 2003).

Portfolio is a flat portable case or a large heavy envelope for carrying paper or drawings as well as design. Portfolio is made to give protection to works of architects, fine artist, graphics and textiles designers. The works kept are usually two dimensional works. The portfolio protects the drawings and designs from effects of negligence, weathering and aging. It also stores all paper drawings or paintings and designs of any media (Ifeagwu, 2005).

Assessment Portfolio keeps design, painting and drawing collections but provides rubric, self-reflection and portfolio models which could be analytic or holistic. It also admits jurying by involving course examiners to assess the works of a student together. That means, the assessment is not unilateral. It allows students to understand how they are being assessed. Portfolio assessment is the procedure used to plan,

collect and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio. The process includes student participation in the selection of work, in criteria, goal setting and self-assessment. Students and teacher collaborate in assessing and evaluating students learning from evidences in portfolio collection, then use the information to make plan and set goals for further learning. Assessment Portfolio contain guidelines for content, criteria for evaluating process and product as well as evidence of student's reflection (Macleod and Erlandson, 2012).

Art and design teachers at all levels Lower, Middle and Higher have traditionally used the end of lesson, a term test, semester test for parents and other stakeholders to view the works of their wards in creative arts. They use the simplest kind of judgment of "good" or "bad" or simply fix letter grades (A, B+, B, C+, and C) and arbitrary percentages to evaluate the works of the learners. Traditional assessments are often considered as subjective (Mamza, 2006; Eisner, 2002; Mbahi, 2000; 1999, Olorukooba, 1990); because they are based on the teachers' perception of aesthetic qualities of art products such as shape, line, colour, balance, harmony and composition.

Lack of criteria or objectivity has often resulted in lack of proper monitoring of students' progress in art, and in the wrong perception that art is not a serious academic subject when compared to other school subjects. Several studies like those of English (2010), Gruber (2008) and Lorna (2003) were made in the past to correct the situation by introducing some forms of assessment in art. Mbahi (2000) and Olorukooba, (2006) observed that such attempts were usually not related to "what is taught". The emphasis is placed on learners' efforts and not achievements. They also noted that it is mainly concerned with cognitive, leaving out the affective and psychomotor aspects of the learners' development. Mamza,(2001) and Olorukooba,(2006) supporting Mbahi,(2000) maintains that this approach to assessing art works and design is often-times based on standards which have little or nothing to do with art or design and therefore cannot be regarded as contributing to the general education of learners in field of art and design. In the universities and tertiary institutions, the traditional portfolios are being used for assessment and in keeping students' art and design projects. The study is set out to find out if there are portfolio assessments in professional courses in departments of the Faculty of Environmental Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The following theory was used to justify the stance of the paper.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Traditional portfolios are being used for assessment and keeping art and design works, but they do not provide comprehensive scheme (rubric, self-reflection form and portfolio model) across the schools and universities. Research shows that students at all levels see assessment as something that is done to them by someone else out of their control or circle of influence.

Most often, they do not acknowledge knowing any evaluation criteria beyond the letter grade or percent recorded on their work. Lack of rubric, self-reflection and portfolio model sheets has been the gaps the

study identified. Portfolios can bridge this gap by providing a structure for involving students in developing and understanding criteria for good work and through the use of critical thinking and self-reflection, enable students to apply these criteria to their own work efforts and that of other students.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain whether students understand the concept of portfolio method of assessment,
2. examine types and variations of portfolio assessment method used in the various departments.
3. identify the problems and the benefits of using portfolio method of assessment.

### **Research Philosophy**

This is a philosophical belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analyzed and used. The study is anchored to views of positivists (positivism). Positivism believes in reality. Positivists see that reality is stable and can be observed and described from an objective view point without interfering with the phenomena being studied. They opined that phenomena should be isolated and that observation should be repeatable. Predictions can be made on the basis of the previously observed and explained realities and their interrelationships. The study observed that at every stage, we make assumptions. It could be assumption about human knowledge, nature of realities of educational phenomena; and look for what importance or value? It is also believed that in research such assumptions would affect the research questions, methodology and interpretation of the findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). By this it is important to adhere to a particular philosophical position to accomplish a philosophical paradigm of the study. To let the teachers, students and school administrators understand the assumptions behind the study; the research philosophy has been stated as in the following:

### **Ontology**

The term ontology is seen as the nature of reality. It is something external to the social world. It is also something that exists in socially negotiated meanings that people give to it (Saunders, et al, 2012). If ontology is reality; the study has identified the reality of portfolios as a means of assessment in teaching and learning. The study discovered that portfolio is more than just a file folder and the work of Mueller (2012) *Authentic Assessment Toolbox* has provided, the reality about the functionality of portfolios as a mode of assessment has been identified in detail. Implementation stages were also provided to teachers in teaching. The toolbox is a guideline for teachers who are innovative and professionally sound.

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology is about knowledge, what is considered knowledge? Knowledge is based on observable phenomena. If epistemology is knowledge and knowledge is derive from new idea (not popular), the information about portfolios reviewed through related literature and *Toolbox of Authentic Assessment* would serve as knowledge to teachers, students and other scholars. The study communicates discovered and identified knowledge. Theory has been used to give an opening to the study to clarify issues regarding

assessment activities of professional courses. By the Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligences the study realized that learning styles and assessment of professional courses are related. The outcome of the study also provides new concepts which are related to portfolio assessment, and serves as knowledge (epistemology). To throw more light to the stance of the paper, the following subheadings are discussed:

1. Concepts of perception, evaluation, continuous and portfolio assessment;
2. Types, categories and contents of assessment portfolio
3. Concerns of portfolio assessment in teaching;
4. Problems and benefits of portfolio assessment.

### **Concepts of Perception, Evaluation, Continuous and Portfolio Assessments**

Perception has been defined by the Advanced English Dictionary's (2014) as opinion, the way one thinks or understands something or the ability to understand or notice something using one of the senses. But psychologically it is the organization, identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment ([www.wordnet.Princeton.edu](http://www.wordnet.Princeton.edu)). Perception in the context of this paper is therefore seen as apprehension or understanding or having a knowledge of a particular thing or idea. Perception has been used to denote the students' knowledge of assessment portfolio. The concept of evaluation is used to enhance learning and foster further students' growth in achieving the objectives of programmes. According to Yusuf, (2012) evaluation in art education is similar to use like other school subjects: to recognize progress and identify areas that need further learning. The term curriculum, according to Yusuf is a derivative from the Latin word 'curare', which means to run. Curriculum has been defined by different authorities. To a few it is an educational system that will help growth and development of the child. Basically, it is seen as guides, syllabi or textbooks that facilitate teaching and learning.

If inadequacies or improvements are observed, there would be replacing, redeveloping and then reappraising. So evaluation is either about improving something that is working or needed improvement (Gatawa cited by Mohammed, 2014). Measuring performance objectively requires observing, setting up criteria for successful performance of the behavior and not in the situational context in which the behavior is to be performed.

Olorukooba (2006) says evaluation is the appraisal of an outcome or achievement of particular objectives. Mohammed (2014) sees it as a process of determining the extent to which educational objectives are being realized by the programme of curriculum and instruction. With Eisner (2002) evaluation is the method whereby students, teachers and materials are diagnosed in order to prescribe treatments that are educationally effective. Yusuf (2012) defines evaluation as the collection and use of information for decision-making about an educational programme or curriculum. If we take a close look at the definitions

we discover everyone sees it the same way. The differences resulted from the use of semantics. All the definitions however maintain the fact that it is a process.

Gatawa in Mohammed, (2014) lists the aims of curriculum evaluation. They are to:

1. determine the outcomes of a programme,
2. help in deciding whether to accept or reject a programme,
3. ascertain the need for revision of the content,
4. help in future development of the curriculum necessary for continuous improvement,
5. and to improve methods of teaching and assessment techniques.

Yusuf asserts that the concept of evaluation was advanced by Scriven and Stake. Scriven in Yusuf stresses continuity in evaluation and emphasized the use of three different but related types of evaluation which included diagnostic, formative and summative evaluations. Gatawa sees diagnostic evaluation as being useful for providing information on students' performance in order to address a perceived problem. According to Mohammed (2014), evaluations focus on assessing program quality, implementation and impact to provide feedback and information for internal improvement. Without external consequences, are called formative evaluations, while evaluation which are designed to study and provide information program impact to external agencies are summative. Formative evaluation is an assessment of the worthiness of an instructional programme that is still capable of being modified. It takes place during the developmental process of a programme. The formative evaluator therefore, attempts to appraise such a programme in order to inform the programme developer on how to do away with deficiencies in instruction. The purpose of formative evaluation is to ensure positive outcome of summative evaluation. Summative evaluation refers to assessment of merits, focused on completed instructional sequence so as to decide on whether or not to adopt that sequence.

Mohammed (2014) distinguishes three types of decisions for which evaluation is used. They are to:

1. Improve curriculum by deciding what instructional material and methods are satisfactory and where change is needed.
2. make decisions about individuals; identifying the needs of the pupils for the sake of planning their instructions, judging pupils' merit for the purpose of selection and grouping, acquainting the pupils with their own progress and deficiencies.
3. Administrative regulations of judging how good the school system is, how good individual teachers are and so on.

### **Types, Categories and Contents of Assessment Portfolio**

Assessment portfolio is a collection of students' works specifically selected to tell a particular story about the student (Mueller, 2012). Student portfolios take many forms. Portfolio is not therefore the pile of students' works that accumulate over a semester or year. Portfolio contains a purposefully selected set of

student's works. Portfolio might contain samples of earlier and later work, often with the student commenting upon or assessing the growth. There are two types of portfolios; which are common in art and design courses. They are known as ordinary (hard) and e-portfolio (soft). The portfolio is used to capture the process of learning and growth. Portfolio particularly authentic ones have most commonly been associated with collection of art and design works. In thoughtful portfolio assignments, students are asked to reflect on their works, to engage in self -assessment and goal setting. There are three categories of portfolios which include developmental portfolio, showcase portfolio and evaluation portfolio.

#### **Developmental Portfolio**

It is the category of portfolio used for growth over a time to show progress to help develop process skills such as self-evaluation and identify strengths and weaknesses. This portfolio contains checklist and all art and design works for the semester.

#### **Showcase Portfolio**

It is the category of portfolio that shows the best works of the student. It prepares the samples of the best works for assessment for teachers to look at. It contains checklist and the best art and design works.

#### **Evaluation Portfolio**

Checklist sheet: It contains assessable art and design works, checklist, rubric, self-reflection and list of members of jury. This portfolio documents achievement for grading purposes, progress towards standards and places student appropriately. The evaluation portfolio contains very important records of evaluation. The content of evaluation portfolio is usually the assessable collection of either drawing or design works; checklist, guidelines for student and teacher conference, conference sheet and self-reflection sheets (Al-Serhani, 2007). The following are the description of the content of assessment portfolio, this is a sheet which can be used for recording the items of the portfolio, particularly the art and design works. It is compiled in an order of columns that features date of entry, title of entry; student's signature and teacher's signature.

- a. Guidelines for Conference Sheet: Provides guidelines the teacher and students would follow for successful conduct of portfolio assessment.
- b. Conference Sheet: It comprises some questions the teacher expects the students respond to in order to direct the students.
- c. Rubrics: These are scoring instrument used when evaluating students' performances. There are two types of rubric: 1. Analytic and 2.Holistic rubrics.

**1. Analytic Rubric:** The analytic requires the teacher to score in parts separately. Then sum up the parts or individual scores to obtain a total score; it is usually a four-point rating scale which provides criteria, explanation of the level of progress and score of a particular assignment.

2. Holistic Rubric: The holistic rubric requires the teacher to score the overall process or product as a whole without judging the component parts separately. The holistic rubric features score; grade and category of the level of the students' performances.
- e. Self-Reflection Sheet: this is a reflection questionnaire which provides student's name; identity number. It also provides some questions, the teacher expects the students involved in the class activity to answer. The reflection of the students helps the teachers to understand why and how the students perceive their experiences and ability to recollect their intuitive knowledge and other question on how to improve the drawing and design were also formulated.

### **Use of Portfolio Assessment in Teaching**

Critics of assessment techniques have expressed fears regarding the use of portfolio as an alternate to the old terminal assessment system. To Abubakar and Naisi (2009) and James in Gofor (2002) the portfolio method is good but expensive and time consuming. The implementation of portfolios as a method of assessment is clogged by absence of well trained teachers in the areas of assessment. As for them, there are variations in criteria of assessment 'from school to school' because assessment in the classroom appears to be a private affair of the teacher. This makes comparability of records between and within schools difficult (Gofor, 2002).

Another area of concern for teachers is that portfolio assessment is parental or needs community support for such a new and unfamiliar system of assessment. Teacher using portfolios should know that change may create difficulty for parents to accept or adjust without a considerable effort to educate them as to the nature and benefits of the new system (portfolio assessment). Parent should be made aware of what is going to transpire with new assessment method at the beginning of the school year. Parents should be invited to discuss and view their children's portfolios with the teachers. Parents should be an essential part of this assessment process and included as equal partners and stakeholders (Dilmac, 2010). The effective use of portfolios as learning and assessment tools depends on the knowledge, ability and experiences of teachers who implement them on a large scale. However, it has been reported by some scholars that most teachers do not have the knowledge and experiences about portfolio assessment methods and other alternative assessment methods. They also stated that teachers have sufficient information regarding portfolios as a means of assessment in the in-service seminars organized by the new education programme (Birgin and Baki in the word of Dilmac, 2010).

### **Research Design**

Descriptive research was used. The purpose of descriptive research is to describe systematically the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest, factually and accurately. The central purpose of using descriptive research is not just the description of 'what is', but the discovery of meaning. The research technique for the study was sample survey. Sample survey was used to obtain information from a

sample of respondents. The study examined trends of assessment practices in the departments of the Faculty of Environmental Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Below are responses of students pertaining their understanding of assessment portfolios.

**Research Question 1. Do Students understand the concept of portfolio assessment?**

**Table 1. Students Understanding of the concept of portfolio assessment method**

Item statistics	S D	D	U	A	S A	Mean	Remark
1. Portfolios are only used for keeping designs and drawings.	13(6.5%)	35(17.5%)	5(2.5%)	76(38.0%)	70(35.0%)	3.79	Agree
2.Portfolios are not necessary for studio courses	63(31.5%)	73(36. 5%)	15(7.5%)	34(17.0%)	15(7.5%)	2.32	Disagree
3. Portfolios do not vary in the faculty of environmental design.	30(15.0%)	67(33.5%)	23(11.5%)	42(21.0%)	38(19.0%)	2.96	Disagree
4. Use of portfolios is good for students learning in drawing and design.	3(1.5%)	3(1.5%)	14(7.0%)	78(39.0%)	102(51.0%)	4.36	Agree
5. Lecturers have not been using portfolios for assessment in drawing and design courses.	29(14.5%)	41(20.5%)	47(23.5%)	59(29.5%)	24(12.0%)	3.04	Agree
6. I have never seen assessment portfolios in my department.	64(32.0%)	45(22.5%)	21(10.5%)	37(18.5%)	33(16.5%)	2.65	Disagree

In table 1, 73% of the respondents indicated that portfolios are only used to keep designs and drawings, 24% disagreed, and 3% were undecided. Sixty eight percent (68%) of the respondents believed portfolios are not necessary for learning; they are good for students (90%), 3% indicated that they are not for students learning. Most students (54%) were familiar and have portfolios.

**Research Question 2; what are problems of the use of Portfolio Assessment?**

**Table 2. Problems of using portfolios as a method of assessment**

	SD	D	U	A	S A	Mean	Remark
1. Too much time to spent using portfolio assessment.	4(6.5%)	20(32.3%)	13(21.0%)	19(30.6%)	6(9.7%)	3.05	Agree
2.Developing portfolio assessment criteria model can be difficult for the teachers	4(6.5%)	17(27.4%)	12(19.4%)	20(32.3%)	9(14.5%)	3.21	Agree
3. Students incur financial expenses in using portfolio.	3(4.8%)	13(21.0%)	7(11.3%)	34(54.8%)	5(8.1%)	3.40	Agree
4. Assessment Portfolios demand the joint commitment of teachers, students and parents.	1(1.6%)	4(6.5%)	8(12.9%)	32(51.6%)	17(27.4%)	3.97	Agree

In table 2, 43% of the students said the use of portfolio assessment takes time, 46% said it can be difficult and 62% confirmed that using portfolio requires money and joint commitment of the teachers and the students (79%).

**Findings of the study**

The findings of the study were:

- I. Students are not familiar with the structure of the assessment portfolio.
- II. The use of portfolios is time consuming, it needs planning and long term preparation.
- III. It demanded joint effort of the teachers to work as members of the jury.
- IV. It needs commitment of both the parents and teachers to monitor the students' progress in art.



## **Conclusion**

Students know the concept of portfolio without knowing what make up the portfolio as medium of assessment as result they did not handle the process properly. The assessment portfolio is called authentic assessment because of the use of rubrics, guidelines; self-reflection and portfolio model sheets. Portfolio model included holistic and analytic rubrics. The assessment is usually implemented by the use of developmental, show-case and evaluation portfolios, which vary in term of content. Whereas, the assessment structure or assessment scheme remains the rubric, self-reflection sheet and portfolio mode. These structures are the measurement regulations that guide the administration of the portfolio assessment.

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