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Mental Implications of Curriculum Evaluation Procedures on Student Dropout in Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mental implications of curriculum evaluation procedures on student dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State, Nigeria. While structural and economic challenges are common causes of dropout, this study emphasizes the psychological toll of rigid, high-stakes, and cognitively focused assessment systems. Using a survey design, data were gathered through structured interviews with dropout students from public tertiary institutions. The findings reveal that inflexible curriculum evaluation procedures contribute significantly to students' withdrawal because they create mental pressure, academic frustration, and a perceived lack of support. Students frequently experience stress, anxiety, and diminished self-worth when repeated failures occur without constructive feedback or the chance for remediation. As a result, dropout often emerges as a mental coping mechanism rather than a voluntary choice. The study calls for the development of student-centered and psychologically responsive evaluation strategies because flexible and inclusive assessment practices can mitigate mental distress and promote educational persistence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Central to the aim and aspiration of any tertiary institution is the provision of an enabling learning environment that accommodates students in school until they graduate and or complete their respective programmes. However, this aspiration could hardly be realized by several students who may, for one reason or another, drop out of school. School dropout, in its simplest term, refers to the untimely withdrawal of a student from school. Dropping out of school is a serious problem as it denies individual students his or her fundamental human right to education. Students' dropout remains a persistent challenge in the Nigerian education system, with far-reaching consequences for both individuals and society. While numerous factors, such as financial resources, health challenges, and insecurity, to mention a few, contribute to this complex issue, the role curriculum evaluation plays often remains under-examined.

Students who withdraw from school prematurely end up not obtaining a certificate of graduation. Individual costs to this dropping out include: lower earnings, unemployment prospects, and a greater likelihood of health problems and limited chances of economic and social well-being in the future (Ahmed & Shehu, 2020). Moreover, students' school dropout has become an alarming problem in developing countries, including Nigeria. Some researchers (Mohammed, 2021) lamented that students' school dropout is a serious problem for the students themselves and society. Understanding the factors influencing students' dropout from school is one of the key issues in addressing the social and economic problems that impede the progress of human resources and their utilization in Nigeria.

From this perspective, some researchers (Raqia, 2023) maintained that students' dropping out of school is the consequence of a complicated and dynamic process involving various causes and interactions across time. It can be described as quitting school before finishing the minimal education requirements for a particular program. Individuals and society suffer as a result of students' dropout, which includes decreased income, lower social status, higher unemployment, poorer health, and increased criminality.

Curriculum evaluation, on the other hand, is an important component of the curriculum that determines its effectiveness. It helps teachers assess the effectiveness and or shortcomings of the entire curriculum and educational system. It analyzes the success of the implementation aspect of the curriculum during classroom interactions and activities. It diagnoses the existing problems in curriculum development and implementation and clarifies the improvement direction, ways, and measures using tests, observations, interviews, questionnaires, quizzes, and so on. Through curriculum evaluation, teachers can ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum for individual students.

Curriculum evaluation is the mechanism that reveals and shapes students' educational experiences and standings. A poorly designed curriculum evaluation process can result in disengagement, academic stress, and a sense of irrelevance, all of which contribute to higher dropout rates (Dayo, 2022). To prevent this, institutions of higher learning should focus on creating relevant, flexible, inclusive, and student-centered curriculum evaluation strategies that meet the diverse needs and talents of their learners. It should be noted that the design of the curriculum, the methods used for teaching, and the procedures for evaluating students all play a critical role in either retaining students or contributing to dropout rates. By adopting a student-centered approach, with flexible curricula, engaging pedagogies, and fair evaluation systems, educational institutions can significantly reduce dropout rates (Mustapha, 2023).

Furthermore, curriculum evaluation is a systematic process of collecting information with the intent of making value judgments on the goodness or badness of the learners'

achievement in subject matter and deciding what grade is to be assigned to a given score (Yusuf, 2020). Evaluation uses information based on credible evidence generated through assessment to make judgments of relative value. It is the process through which teachers, administrators, parents, and other interested stakeholders get evidence, numerical or otherwise, from which they can develop useful information about their students, institutions, and programmes. Evaluation procedures have a significant impact on students' engagement or disengagement in the teaching and learning process. The way evaluation procedures are structured, administered, and perceived by students can either motivate them to persist in their studies or contribute to academic frustration and dropout.

It is worth stating that high-stakes evaluation brings about pressure and anxiety on the part of students (Afolabi & Akinpelu, 2018). Evaluation procedures that rely heavily on rigorous exams (such as semester or sessional) can create immense pressure on students. This stress may result in anxiety, particularly for students who do not perform well under exam conditions. Continuous failure in such high-stakes evaluation often leads to discouragement, resulting in dropout. In the same vein, examinations usually offer limited opportunities for improvement, especially where students are given few chances to prove their knowledge or skills; they may feel they have little room to recover from failure. This can lead them to lose hope and begin to perceive that they cannot meet the academic expectations and drop out, subsequently.

Moreover, when evaluation procedures are rigid and rely on a uniform method, such as a written exam, they may fail to accommodate different learning styles and strengths. Some researchers (Mathew, 2022) lamented that students who excel in practical work, presentations, or group projects but struggle with written tests may feel disadvantaged, leading to frustration and potential dropout. An evaluation procedure that assesses students solely on exams may overlook students' learning progress throughout the semester. Continuous assessment methods, such as regular quizzes, assignments, and class participation, allow students to demonstrate ongoing improvement and keep them engaged. The absence of such methods can result in students losing track of their performance and disengaging from their studies.

Lack of constructive feedback can also lead students to drop out. In situations where students do not receive timely and constructive feedback on their performance, they may not know where they stand academically or how to improve. This lack of feedback can make students feel lost or unsupported, especially if they are struggling, leading to higher dropout rates (Eze, 2020). On the contrary, evaluation procedures that provide personalized and detailed feedback help students understand their strengths and weaknesses. When students see a clear path to improvement, they are more likely to remain engaged and motivated to continue their studies.

Evaluation procedures that are biased or unfair due to favoritism or inconsistent grading practices may lead students to become disillusioned with the academic system. Perceived unfairness in evaluation can significantly contribute to dropout, as students lose trust in the institution. Equally, when grading criteria are unclear or students do not understand how their performance is being measured, they may feel confused and frustrated (Adeyamo, 2021). A transparent evaluation process, where students understand the expectations and grading rubric, helps to address such concerns and keeps students engaged.

Overemphasis on academic performance and the neglect of non-academic skills may result in students to dropout (Adewuyi, 2021). Evaluation procedures that focus exclusively on academic performance, such as cognitive test scores or grades, may not account for students' broader skills and talents. For instance, students with strong interpersonal or leadership skills

may feel undervalued as their competencies are not recognized. This lack of a holistic evaluation procedure that includes other non-cognitive but essential skills like participation, collaboration, or creativity can demotivate students, leading to dropout.

An evaluation procedure that fails to recognize improvement opens a space for students' dropout. Students who show gradual improvement may still struggle if the evaluation process only rewards peak performance. Evaluation procedures that do not acknowledge effort and progress over time can demoralize students who are making strides but may not yet achieve high scores, pushing them toward dropout. When the evaluation procedure did not provide support for underperforming students, such as offering makeup exams, tutoring, or additional resources, struggling students may feel left behind. If students are unable to access the necessary help to improve, they may perceive dropout as their only option. In contrast, an evaluation procedure that allows for re-evaluation or additional attempts to improve scores (such as re-takes or re-submissions) offers students a second chance to succeed. An inflexible evaluation procedure that does not offer such opportunities may lead to feelings of hopelessness and increased dropout rates (Lawal, 2020; Adeniji, 2021).

Overloading students with assessments may also result in dropout. A high volume of assignments or frequent tests and exams without considering students' workload across all their courses can lead to burnout. Students who feel overwhelmed by multiple evaluations, often scheduled closely together, may struggle to manage their time effectively. This academic overload can increase stress and contribute to dropout (Abdullahi, 2022). In addition, inappropriate scheduling of assessments, such as clustering exams at the end of the semester without ongoing evaluations, can leave students unprepared and anxious. If students face repeated poor performance due to poor assessment timing, they may lose confidence in their ability to succeed, leading to dropout.

As part of the reasons for school dropout, some researchers (Fan & Walters, 2020) lamented that poor academic achievement, teaching methods, and evaluation procedures that are enshrined in the curriculum are equally significant causes for students to drop out of school. The school dropout phenomenon can therefore be related to the irrelevant curriculum evaluation procedure employed in the institutions of learning. Irrelevant curriculum evaluation and the lack of synergy of educational programs influence the dropout behavior in schools. The dropout phenomenon occurred because the curriculum was unable to meet the individual's vocational and intellectual needs.

The procedures used to assess students' learning can also influence dropout rates. Some researchers (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2017) maintained that frequent high-stakes assessments can create anxiety and stress, leading some students to give up on their education. A more balanced assessment approach that includes a variety of formative and summative assessments can help reduce stress and promote students' learning. Teachers who are not adequately prepared to deliver the curriculum can negatively affect students' learning and motivation. Effective teacher training is essential for providing quality instruction and fostering positive learning environments, as well as implementing the appropriate curriculum design and employing an appropriate evaluation technique. In line with this, positive relationships between teachers and students can create a supportive learning environment and reduce dropout rates. When students feel valued and connected to their teachers and the curriculum, they are more likely to persist in pursuing education.

The problem of school dropout has already established its grip on our educational system (Ademola, 2023). This study has come at a time when there is a high rate of insecurity in the country as a result of criminal activities. Survey by several scholars, as well as the print and electronic media, tends to indicate that over 85% of the criminal activities perpetuated in

Nigeria were done by youths who either did not attend or dropped out of school (Carlson, 2019; Peter, 2020; Karim, 2022). This negative development has become a cause of serious concern to academia and all well-meaning Nigerians. This tends to add to the socio-economic and political problems that impede the progress of human resources and their utilization in Nigeria.

Previous studies on issues of school dropout are mainly focused on individual financial status, social hierarchy, and or lack of infrastructure. It is a common perception among the populace, including those in the academic circle, that factors like low quality of education and teacher quality are also added to the possible reasons for students' school dropout. However, the effect of the curriculum evaluation procedure on students' school dropout has not been sufficiently studied.

Although numerous factors can be attributed to the reasons for students' school dropout, this study delves into the intricate relationship between curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina state, exploring how the specific nature of assessment in the curriculum can either encourage or deter students to persist in their education. The problem of this study is to determine whether the curriculum evaluation procedure used in tertiary institutions influences students' school dropout in Katsina State.

The study was guided by the following objective: to ascertain the relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State.

The study answered the following question: What is the relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State?

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance: Ho1. There is no significant relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State.

2. METHODS

The study employed a survey research design. The population of the study comprised ten state-owned public tertiary institutions with a total number of two hundred and 265 school dropout students from 2020 to 2024. 92 dropout students were randomly selected as a sample and participated in the study. Students' school dropout interview (SSDI) was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument contained five structured items designed through a modified Likert scale format of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, and strongly disagreed. For analysis, these responses were apportioned numbers 4, 3, 2, and 1; accordingly. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the instrument yielded a reliability index of 0.82.

At the initial stage, names and mobile phone numbers of the presumed dropout students were obtained from the office of the academic secretaries of the respective institutions. The dropout students were then contacted for their consent to respond to the questions informal interview. Within four weeks, ninety-two dropout students responded, and their responses were coded and analyzed. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question, while Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research question: What is the relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina state?

Table 1 revealed that a cumulative mean score of 2.86 and the standard deviation of 0.14 out of the total mean score of 4.0 were calculated in the affirmative positions of strongly agreed and agreed, respectively. This indicates that, curriculum evaluation procedure used in tertiary institutions influences students' dropout from school.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of responses of school dropout students.

Responses Decision	N	Mean	SD	
I dropped out because I couldn't cope with the overwhelming assignments, tests, and exams.	92	2.93	0.11	
I dropped out because I was not given the opportunity to resit the failed exam.	92	3.98	0.09	Accepted
I dropped out because I cannot comprehend the applied questions in the exam.	92	2.67	0.12	
I dropped out because there is no provision of skills, talent and creativity in the exam.	92	2.10	0.17	Accepted
I dropped out because of too many carryover courses.	92	2.16	0.21	Accepted
Cumulative Mean Score:	92	2.86	0.14	Accepted

3.2. Ho₁. There is no significant relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State.

Table 2 reveals that the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient obtained was 0.830, indicating a strong positive correlation in the responses of school dropout students on the relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure used in tertiary institutions and students' school dropout in Katsina state. The p-value = 0.000 is less than the alpha value = 0.05 ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). The hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina state, is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State.

Table 2. Pearson product-moment correlation of responses of school dropout students.

Evaluation Procedure: School Dropout			
Curriculum Evaluation Procedure	Pearson correlation	1.830**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	92	92
School Dropout	Pearson correlation	0.830**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	92	92

3.3. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure and students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Katsina State. This finding agrees with previous findings (Dayo, 2022), which revealed that a poorly designed curriculum evaluation process contributes to students' higher dropout rates. The findings of this study supported other findings (Abdullahi, 2022) that overloading

students with assessments results in dropout. The findings of this study are in line with previous findings (Adeyamo, 2021) that unclear, rigid, and unfair evaluation procedures enhance the prospects of students' dropout in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The finding of this study agrees with the previous findings (Ahmed & Shehu, 2020), which revealed that overwhelming carryover courses result in students' school dropout in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

4. CONCLUSION

Too many courses a student have to register and pass per semester and session carries along with-it strenuous demand for series of homework, assignments and tests as part of continuous assessment and examination which were believed to have focused much on the cognitive domain at the expense of other relevant domains of affective, value and psychomotor. This could eventually culminate in several carry-overs, with the result of forcing students to drop out. This study has therefore concluded that there exists a significant relationship between the curriculum evaluation procedure used and students' school dropout cases in higher institutions in Katsina State.

Based on the findings and the conclusion drawn, the study recommended that a committee of curriculum experts, subject specialists and all other relevant stakeholders in tertiary institutions in Katsina state should be constituted and shouldered the responsibility to review the existing curriculum evaluation procedure provision and develop a simple, clear, objective, comprehensive and integrated curriculum evaluation strategies that suits the peculiarities of each programme offered. This will help address concerns of overloaded assessment, bias, ambiguity, and cognitively centered curriculum evaluation procedures, unnecessary carry-overs, and dropout casualties.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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