A GLOBAL ONLINE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE: AN INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

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Abstract
Students' assessment experience is a two-side of a coin that portrays one side depending on another. This paradoxically depicts examining ways of improving students' learning but consequently telling stories about teachers' approach. When students expressly reveal that they pass exams through surface learning, this may imply that the teachers' approach allows this. Contrarily, when students adduce their performance to teachers' feedback, it could be an indication that the teacher dedicates much time and effort to understanding students' strength and weaknesses. In the light of this, an empirical study conducted on students' assessment experience is reported to identify factors that account for students' assessment across disciplines. An important factor derived is feedback; its direct relationship with improved learning outcomes which every teacher desires to achieve is emphasised. An interesting part of this article is the story-telling part which sourced for teachers' assessment experience globally through social networks (linkedIn, HETL, LMS) to gather a diverse opinion on teaching improvement. This open platform allows global perspectives to be shared, constructive criticisms to be debated and reflective ideas to be assimilated.

Academic Social Networking Sites
The emergence of academic social networking sites (ASNS) is not unconnected with the spring of social networking sites that are majorly for social interaction. Purposely, ASNS evolved for academic social interactions, collaboration and research networking on dedicated social platforms. Platforms such as academia, linkedIn, google scholar, researchgate are created to provide academic support services to academia to facilitate researches and promote professional developement. Prominent among the services offered on these platforms are: research collaboration, citation counts, publication upload, almetrics (impact measurement), information dissemination and sharing and a host of others. Though, each of these platforms focuses on unique and specialised services, yet the goal remains the same: promoting academics and researches through collaborative networking. Each of them also use specific terms that distinguish it from one another. Researchgate for instance, uses research gate score (RGscore) to term its almetrics, kudos use metrics, google scholar uses citations, to mention a few. The RG score point system calculates the publication uploads and downloads, citations, discussion, online presence, collaboration to improve individual researcher's reach. Google scholar with its citation system harnesses researcher's publications, count up to ten publications cited from an author to make a h-index then when just one article of an author is cited ten times to give an i-index. Kudos on the other hand rely on author's explanation of their work, number of views by connections and network visibility for its metrics. LinkedIn, though extended to other professions have academic platforms. It is a host platform for other platforms where researchers of similar research interest connects to collaborate, discuss, share and build further networks (Jung and Wei, 2011; Leeder, 2008). Through this LinkedIn platform, via the Higher Education Teaching and Learning (HETL) group, the researcher started a discussion on stories and experiences about students and how lecturers address the challenges faced with students' assessment in classrooms, the discussion culminated into further

discussions like; "Do student evaluations measure teaching effectiveness?" and many more assessment issues as captured under global teachers' assessment stories.

Feedback as a Key Assessment Strategy

Assessment emphasizes outcomes, or what students have learned, it is associated with the end-product of the learning process. Suskie (2004) comprehensively describes assessment as the ongoing process of establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning. Assessment should show evidence that students are actually learning, it is a way for students to demonstrate what they learn in a way that elicit understanding. Similarly, Gibbs (2007) explains assessment in education as the process of gathering, interpreting, recording and using information about pupils' responses to an educational task. Assessment differs greatly from giving grades, while assessment provides specific information about strength and weakness of assignment, grades allot overall scores which may be standardised or non-standardised. As such, educators need to realise that assigning grades is just a part of feedback; it does not replace it because it reflects no justification for the grade given. What students did in the task that earn marks or those that lead to loss of marks should be spelt out. Ways to improve on the weak areas should also be suggested as part of the feedback. Thus, feedback should be handled accordingly so as to enhance students' performance and eventually promote school improvement.

On the other hand, some students do not seek to know the meaning of a topic or an assignment; they do not aim at understanding; they only focus on details, try to memorize parts, and study the layout, with the purpose of meeting the requirements of the task. This is buttressed by Gibbs (2006) expressing that students are being strategic by allocating time and focusing attention on what they believe will be assessed and gain them good grades. These students are shallow learners as opposed to rich and deep learners whom schools aim to produce. Thus, educators should ensure that shallow learners are turned into deep learners through assessment methods that endear students to the content of learning rather than just earning grades. Gibbs (2010) asserts that students who do not understand what they are supposed to do tend to revert to a surface approach and simply reproduce material, in the absence of any clearer imperatives. He thus reiterates that assessments need to be challenging and explicit in its goals and standards.

Therefore, in any form of assessment, it is crucial for the learner to receive detailed feedback that shows strengths and weaknesses in the area of assessed work and suggesting areas where improvements or changes might be made in the future. This fact is adduced to by Sliney and Murphy (2011) that assessment should provide a balanced picture of user's strength and weaknesses. As such, there should be frequent and prompt feedback that provides clear details for students to understand their strengths and weaknesses (Mary, 2004). Balanced feedback reveals the direction of the performance and clearly identifies areas of improvement subsequently building skills and confidence in the students. Students benefit a lot when teachers provide formative feedback based on clear criteria, so that they can continuously improve the quality of work. Gibbs (2010) reports that studies have found that programmes with low levels of marked work but high levels of feedback (with no marks attached) had students who worked harder and distribute effort evenly across topics on courses. However, if learners only receive the final grade that tells the collation of all the students' assessment at the end of the semester (summative feedback) without a description of what and where they have done better or poor, it will be difficult to improve on identified weak areas and they could be unaware of the strong points. Consequently, the assessment will fail to fulfil the essence of feedback in the learning situation. This kind of situation could be ridiculous in health related courses like medicine and pharmacy; it could be disastrous if students do not know what aspects and why they did well or failed.

Methodology for the Case Study on Student Assessment Experience
This study explored students' assessment experience among 160 purposively sampled students from different faculties and levels from an International University with students of diverse background. Two research questions were raised in this study: (what are the factors that account for students' assessment experience and what is the relationship between students' achievement grade (CGPA) and the factors that determine their experience). Principal Component Factor Analysis (PCFA) was computed on the students' data to determine what factors accounted for the assessment experiences in the various disciplines. Gibb's students' assessment experience questionnaire (AEQ) was adapted to fit in this study's setting and sample. The modified instrument for this research contains 30 items and the demographic variables of participants. Subsequently, Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was also run to determine the relationship between the criterion (students' CGPA) and the predictors (factors that accrue from the PCA).

Analysis of Results and Discussion
The study gives rise to 3 factors: feedback, assignment benefit and shortcut to success from the PCFA as opposed to 6 factors found in Gibb's (2003). The three factors have a good reliability ranging from .77 to .69. This finding indicates that students' assessment experience can be explained in the light of feedback, assignment benefit and shortcut to success. Only one of these three predictors (feedback) was found to be significant and positively related to the criterion (CGPA) indicating that the more feedback students get on work done; the greater and positive bearing it has on the CGPA. The feedback factor explains students' interpretation of assessment feedback and their lecturers' way of giving feedback on their work. Rust, C., Price, M. and O'Donovan, B. (2003) give a detailed expectation of what feedback should do for students and these were in line with students' demands in the feedback factor. The second factor which was labelled assignment benefit describes how assignments impact on students' learning. Gibbs', (2003) also found in his study that focus on assignment is a factor which corresponds to the findings of this research. The quality of assignment given by the lecturer is extremely important in shaping the minds of the students towards understanding of the course content. Moreover, the frequency of assignment determines students' involvement and concentration on the course. Not just giving assignment without appropriate and adequate feedback that tells students their weak areas and applauds their strength.

Lastly, the third factor (shortcut to success) gives a description of how students' concern is primarily based on success without much ado rather than doing depth work to achieve success. This third factor is consistent with the submission of (Entwistle and Tait, 1990; Ramsden, 1997) that students prefer surface approaches to passing exams rather than indepth approach. Gibbs (2006) expressed that students are being strategic by allocating their time and focusing their attention on what they believe will be assessed and gain them good grades. He refers to students who are simply conscious of cues to help them pass exams as "cue conscious". All these three factors are also consistent with the findings of Gibbs', (2003) on quality and use of feedback, focus on assignment and approach to exams among other six factors he found in his own study.
It further indicates that all the items in the instrument are correlated and as such, it is good and fit to proceed for PCA.

The correlation analysis reveals the strength and significance of the instrument. This indicates that the data generated from the instrument is suitable for both PCA and MRA analysis and the result is valid and reliable. The anti-image and communality analysis helped to determine if all the items in the instrument can be rotated and extracted well enough for PCA. However, two items (items 2 and 9) failed to meet the requirements of both analysis (anti-image and communality) which must be greater than .5 (Kaiser, 1974). The two items has .45 and .44 respectively as such they were removed in order to give a good rotation and extraction. The result further elicit through total variance explained that 8 of the 30 items accounted for 63.7% of the total value. This indicates that the individual variables have good weightage and as such give credibility to the instrument. The high Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient found in this study explains the relevance of the 3 factors (feedback, assignment benefit and shortcut to success) that accrued from the output to students' assessment.

The multiple regression analysis result indicates that one predictor (feedback) was significant and it is positively related to the criterion (CGPA) meaning that, the more feedback students get on their work; the greater and positive bearing it has on their CGPA. This is consistent with Rust, C., Price, M. and O'Donovan, B. (2003)'s submission that feedback is most likely to have an effect if students are fully aware that what they encounter is meant as feedback and if they take note of it in order to improve their learning. They asserted that feedback directly relate to learning outcomes. The other two predictors/factors (Assignment benefit and Shortcut to Success) have a negative relationship with the criterion (CGPA). This implies that students' assignment and other shortcut strategies students use to pass their examinations do not greatly increase their performance (increase in CGPA). This is inconsistent with the submissions of Gibbs', (2003) that focus on assignment has a positive impact on students' learning and that students prefer surface approaches to passing exams rather than indepth approach (Entwistle and Tait, 1990; Ramsden, 1997).

Contrasting ideas however can be glimpsed from the findings of Dweck, (2000, 2002) who found a strong negative correlation between students' performance and their beliefs about whether ability is innate or can be improved. Additionally, the study concluded that students who believed that they had low ability levels realized decreased performance in the testing situation. This argument is interesting because research also demonstrates that people who believe they have control over their learning do better than those who do not (Ames, 1992; Weiner, 2000; Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1978. Having control is, nevertheless, associated with beliefs in innate ability (Dweck, 2000, 2002).

Students' Stories
Both undergraduate and postgraduate students from another university (Universiti Utara Malaysia) were given open-ended questions on assessment, feedback and approach to learning through the university's learning management system. Their approaches to learning and assessment vary however; their responses to lecturers' feedback were unanimous. While responding to the question on "What influence does feedback from lecturers have on your learning?", a student describes that: "*Feedback from lecturers helps me a lot in identifying my mistakes and its improve my efficiency in the class and understanding the content of the courses much better.*" He stated further that: "*Lecturers' feedback on our assignment makes us always prepared and we can identify our mistakes and try to do better in the final examinations.*" Another student explains that; " *… the feedback from lecturers on my learning is very useful because I can get to know the mistake that I have made in my assignment and learning technique so that I can make an improvement on the part that I am weak in.*" One other postgraduate student believes that the influence of lecturers' feedback on students encompasses decision making processes and gives better insight and perspective on the subject matter.

In all, the students responses on feedback emphasises the importance of feedback on their learning and how it helps them improve on their weak areas. Some of them believe in only positive feedback while some are of the opinion that even negative feedbacks help them strengthen their grasp of the content. Some strongly consider feedback not only as instrument of improving on their work but also a useful tool for future use. A student succinctly describes feedback thus: "*Lecturer's feedback is helpful for me to identify which theories should be practiced or emphasized in future career and dos & don'ts list while doing assignment.*" This is line with Ramsden (1991) and Saljo (1981) that students' feedback needs to be clear of the standards set for the assessment. Assignments need to be challenging but feasible, it also needs to be clear what kind of standard has been set. The extent to which students experience "clear goals and standards" (as measured by the Course Experience Questionnaire, Ramsden, 1991) is closely associated with the extent to which students take a surface approach or a deep approach to their studies (Säljö, 1981). Students who don't understand what they are supposed to be doing tend to revert to a surface approach and simply reproduce material, in the absence of any clearer imperatives.

Similarly, while responding to the question on "Which among your various ways of studying for exams always work better for you or help you pass better?", most students emphasised feedback and stated few other approaches. One student expressed that: "*lecturers' feedback, understanding course content, doing assignments and quizzes, AOC- area of concentration, all of that has helped me.*" Another student briefly stated; "I think lecturer's feedback and understanding is more effective." However, only one student stated a contrary opinion. She believed in other approaches but strongly posited that group discussion is the most effective approach thus, "*lecturers' feedback, understanding course content, doing assignments and quizzes, AOC, treating past questions, but for me, the most effective way is to form a group and do a lot of discussion, because learning through discussion is more fun, interactive and save more time, other than we compare when we only do the reading.*" In support of group discussion as mentioned by some students, Thomas, Martin and Pleasants (2011) reasoned that in higher education settings, assessment tasks get the attention of students, but once students submit their work they typically become disengaged with the assessment process. Hence, opportunities for learning are lost as they become passive recipients of assessment outcomes. They thus suggest self-assessment and peer-assessment as two effective teaching and learning processes that help in knowledge construction. Similarly, Biggs and Tang (2007) posit that dialogic process by which the learner constructs knowledge on the basis of evidence from peers and teachers is very promising.

An extremely important element in teaching and learning which is most times out-casted or usually not formally integrated in class is Berk (2003) refers to as barrier breaker that connects lecturers with students. Berk expressed that Professors and students seem to come from different planets and barriers frequently exist that impede their communication, such as age, income and cholesterol level. He asserted that "humor" can break down these barriers so that professors can better connect with their students and other audiences. It can be used as a teaching tool to facilitate learning (Berk,2003). This is succintly expressed by a student who stated that: "*the funny way in which my favourite lecturer handles her class and illustrates with practical examples in her course help me to remember the subject very well in the exam and in life situations*".

Humor can be used as a systematic teaching or assessment tool in your classroom and course Web site. It can shock students to attention and bring deadly, boring course content to life. Since some students have the attention span of goat cheese, we need to find creative online and offline techniques to hook them, engage their emotions, and focus their minds and eyeballs on learning. Berk (2011)

Global Teachers' Story on Assessment
Online comments of teachers worldwide from social networking sites (LinkedIn, HETL) are discussed to ensure a global outlook of assessment experiences. Professionals from all around the globe participated in an online discussion on HETL on the topic: "Do student evaluations measure teaching effectiveness?" Each contributor gave their perspective of what evaluation represent in their classrooms, how effective it is in students' learning and how it enhances their own approach to teaching in class and how feedback impacts on learning. This approach enables Professionals world over to express how the autonomy they enjoyed in their teaching has improved their teaching proficiency and broadened students' horizon. Being an open platform, this social network discussion forum also allows global perspectives to be shared, constructive criticisms to be debated and reflective ideas to be assimilated.

JD Eveland, a Faculty Mentor at the School of Business and Technology Management at Northcentral University expressed his thoughts regarding the timing of feedback thus: "*I once experimented with an in-class real-time feedback system. I gave every student three colored cards. They were to display their green card if they were following the lecture/discussion, their yellow card if they were hesitant, and their red card if they were confused. After an initial learning period, the system worked surprisingly well for a time. Of course, the students soon learned that if they were going to display a red card they had better have a good*

question ready, since I would probably call on them. Eventually, this proved to be the downfall of the system. But it was proof of a sort that real-time feedback is possible. ... Processing real-time feedback is complicated. But it is certainly an ideal that we ought to consider in methodological terms.

In higher education settings, assessment tasks get the attention of students, but once students submit their work they typically become disengaged with the assessment process. Hence, opportunities for learning are lost as they become passive recipients of assessment outcomes. Thus, dialogic process by which the learner constructs knowledge on the basis of evidence from peers and teachers is very promising (Biggs and Tang, 2007).

Two effective teaching and learning processes that can assist with the development of such judgment are self-assessment and peer-assessment, and the literature provides examples of how these processes have been used successfully in higher education. Developing assessment processes that encourage future learning is not a simple task and based on our experience careful planning is required to ensure alignment between the philosophical underpinnings, the intended purpose, and practicalities of the assessment tools and processes. This requires a deeper level of constructive alignment of assessment principles with teaching curriculum reform processes in higher education should encourage academics to find ways of assessing students' work that demonstrate high levels of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Thomas et.al (2011) encourage academics to consider constructive alignment not only within the context and timeline of their subjects, but also in terms of how the assessment and intended learning outcomes align with the contexts their students may work in upon graduation. They argue that assessment processes can be designed to not only measure, but also encourage learning that is relevant to the roles that students may fulfil in the professional community upon graduation

Shafeeq Hussain a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia align with the concept of peer review when he said; "*Indeed, portfolios if they are peer reviewed and instructor reviewed on weekly basis are best means to make students aware of their own learning and thus engagement with it. Students themselves need to take charge of learning and reflecting on their development through portfolios. This is very challenging for both instructors and students!*"

Peggy Schooling, Ed.D., Assistant Professor Immaculata University also attest to the efficacy of peer review in his class; "*I use a peer-review as a process for fixing mistakes. I teach in the Education Division and so I try to give students experiences with assessing their peers' student performance using rubrics and providing specific, clear feedback and meaningful feedback, similar to what they need to do with their future K-12 students.*"

Negative Feedback
There are some assumptions that negative feedback are detrimental to students' learning and it can limit their interest in the course and especially the instructor. Global teachers' responses reveal varying opinion on this matter as presented below. While responding to a post on HETL "Do your students learn from mistakes or do they just get discouraged?" Ben Agwah, a Lecturer at Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri describes different group of students and how they respond to negative feedbacks:

> My study shows that students who are eager to learn are willing to try it out a couple of times, as many times as it will take them to get it right. They feel disappointed, not discouraged, that they were unable to get it right, as they try to get it right they make efforts to do so the very next time and when that fails they get more determined not to fail again. There is also a second group who are the opposite of the first group. The problem with these is that they feel that the instructor should be grateful to them for getting it right and so whenever they get it wrong they feel the instructor has cheated them as they have no zeal to make another effort. They feel that the instructor has failed.

Bob Ertischek Founder at Profology believes that no matter what opinion students hold about negative feedback, teaching them to embrace mistakes is the key to help them. He opines; *"You can also help students view their mistakes as helpful. The red pen isn't the enemy -- when students understand how to deal with errors, red means go."*

Deep Learning

It is imperative also to address the concept of deep and surface learning. Biggs (1999) elaborates in his book; "What the student does: Teaching for enhanced learning" thus: "The deep approach refers to activities that are appropriate to handling the task so that an appropriate outcome is achieved. The surface approach is therefore to be discouraged, the deep approach encouraged - and that is my working definition of good teaching. Learning is thus a way of interacting with the world. As we learn, our conceptions of phenomena change, and we see the world differently. The acquisition of information in itself does not bring about such a change, but the way we structure that information and think with it does. Thus, education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information." (p. 60)

Students today are even more strongly influenced by the perceived demands of the assessment system in the way they negotiate their way through their studies (MacFarlane, 1992). Presumably the kind of learning that coursework involves has long-term consequences, while the kind of learning involved in revision for exams does not. Studies of surface and deep approaches to learning have shown similar results: that any positive impact on test results of students taking a surface approach in preparation for the test are very short-lasting (Marton & Wenestam, 1978).

Bradley Brooks, *M.Ed in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs (PASA),* posits that students' worldview influences their learning adaptability. He states;

> …when trying to understand assessment and student learning in their own rite, as well as the intersectionality of the two, I would like to add two additional layers in this complex yet highly passionate interest of assessing student learning: identity and leadership. How can we expect students to master deep level learning (converting working-memory sensory to short term memory, with the ultimate goal of arriving at a long-term commitment of learning) if many of our students do not know who they are at their core? There are many roadblocks to the learning process and it's different for everyone (I think we all can attest to this realization to some degree), learning roadblocks that are deeply embedded into an individual sense of self and how they interact with the world around them.

On the contrary, Aleardo Manacero, *Associate Professor at UNESP - São Paulo State University* believes strongly in surface learning with regards to certain contents or courses. He argues;

> In another direction, some of the previous comments are *addressing deep/surface learning* basically stating that deep learning is the right way to go. I have to disagree with this for some of the contents that have to be taught. In my case (teaching to computer science majors) it is important, for example, that every student have a surface knowledge about operating systems design, but those who are going to work as database analysts do not need to know the deep concepts involved with that (the same is true for database concepts for a network analyst...). So, surface learning has also its relevance in the professional formation.

Discussion and Conclusion

This subsection recaps the issues discussed in this article. Balanced feedback is an important element of assessment in enhancing students' learning by revealing areas of possible improvement for students. Negative feedback is believed to be a reinforcement if students are made to understand "red means go". Humor is a rarely-recognized tool for students' improved learning however few researches are coming up with evidences that humor can do the trick of learning enhancement. Opinions gathered in this article show that both deep and surface learning are beneficial to students depending on the contextual approach. Peer engagement is also emphasized as a learning improvement strategy reiterated by both lecturers and students. The quantitative case study presented in this article reports feedback, assignment benefit and shortcut to success as factors that lead to their improved grade. Students' stories on the other hand report lecturers' feedback, understanding course content, doing assignments and quizzes, AOC, treating past questions and most importantly, group discussion as ways of improved learning. The Academic social networking opportunity gives a wide range of scholarly contributions across the globe where academics of diverse background provided their input as it cuts across education regardless of the policy of each country.

Implications for Further Research
Each and every one, whether used to be a student or still a student has a story to tell and the best way to capture such wide ranging stories is to hear them recap it through a one-one interview. In essence, student assessment experience studies are better conducted using a qualitative method or preferably mixed methods. This is why this research combines a quantitative study such as the one reported as "case study on student assessment experience" which is limited in scope and depth of responses with the qualitative section on "Students' stories and Global Teachers' stories on assessment" to ensure a comprehensive outlook on students' assessment from both students and lecturers' perspectives. This article covers some issues relating to assessment ranging from balanced and negative feedback, humor as a tool for learning enhancement, grading, students' approach to learning, deep and surface learning. Further studies may therefore use similar or better approach from the one employed in this research and look into broader perspectives on students' assessment to enhance teachers' professional aptitude. Academic social networking platform used in this study (LinkedIn-HETL) affords the opportunity of diverse collaborative discussion that enriched the study. Though the platform is not just limited to discussion as such, other services afforded by the ASNS should be further explored for research purposes.

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