



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INTEGRATING CULTURAL AND ETHICAL DIMENSIONS INTO ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CALABAR, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined challenges and opportunities in integrating cultural and ethical dimensions into assessment and evaluation in public secondary schools in Calabar, Nigeria. Guided by three objectives and corresponding research questions, a descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised 2,455 educators and evaluators, from which 400 respondents were selected using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected using the Cultural and Ethical Dimensions in Assessment and Evaluation Questionnaire (CEDAEQ). Experts in Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument, while reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha produced coefficients of 0.76, 0.81, and 0.84, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analysed using multiple linear regression at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that cultural and ethical factors significantly influence the implementation of assessment practices. Incorporating these dimensions enhances fairness, transparency, and inclusiveness. The study also found that professional training, community

participation, and effective policy implementation are key to promoting culturally and ethically responsive evaluation systems. The study concluded that assessment practices must align with cultural realities and ethical principles to ensure credibility, equity, and sustainability. It is recommended that educational authorities institutionalize culturally responsive policies, provide continuous training for assessors, and actively involve communities in the evaluation process.

Keywords: Cultural dimensions, Ethical considerations, Inclusive social transformation

Introduction

Assessment and evaluation models play a critical role in the inclusion and sustainable social transformations in evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of social programmes, policies, and development interventions. As societies grow to be more diverse, particularly in multicultural areas like Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria, it is important to make sure that these structures are culturally sensitive and ethically based. The inability to incorporate cultural and ethical aspects into the assessment and evaluation practices, in most cases, may lead to the creation of ineffective programmes that fail to satisfy the needs of the community. It is an urgent problem in Calabar Municipality, where social transformation programmes do not always consider the local cultural background and ethical principles, and as a result, the design and execution of social initiatives cannot be associated with the realities of the community.

Cultural sensitivity in evaluations is the capacity of evaluation models to identify, honour, and integrate the varied cultures, languages, value systems, and social standards of the community. Calabar Municipality and its multicultural background, with the mixture of urban and rural population, is the right place to investigate how to integrate the elements of culture into the assessment practice. Branch (2019) also mentions that the assessment, which does not consider local customs and beliefs, may overlook important aspects, due to which social programmes become successful. An example would be in Calabar, where the impact of indigenous knowledge systems and community practices are very important in shaping the social and economic behaviours of the people; an assessment framework that does not put these factors into consideration would probably overlook the importance of such programmes in creating health, education, or employment-related changes.

The significance of introducing ethical tenets in assessment systems is also high. Moral concerns during testing guarantee that the rights, dignity, and privacy of the individuals are not violated during testing. The practice of ethics assessment is also based on the principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability, so that the assessment process is not discriminatory. Bias, inequity, and exploitation in some places, such as the Calabar Municipality, where marginalised groups tend to be socially excluded, ethical standards in the assessment can be used to protect against them. Moreover, ethical evaluations strengthen the validity of evaluation methods as they ensure that all voices are acknowledged,

particularly those of the vulnerable or underserved groups, and that they are respected and represented when evaluating the social programmes (Marrone et al. 2022).

Although the significance of cultural and ethical integration has increasingly been realised, several of the assessment practices in Calabar Municipality have not utilised it well. The research issue is directly related to the disconnection between the theoretical recognition of cultural sensitivity and ethical evaluation of clinical practices and the actual implementation of the latter in the local context. Most social programmes in Calabar Municipality, especially in the education sector, health, and provision of the infrastructure, are usually assessed or measured against externally imposed, standardised systems that do not consider the local culture or ethical factors. Consequently, the evaluations can be incapable of reflecting the real needs of the community and may not even include the views of the marginalised population, making them ineffective and unsustainable.

Assessments are not grounded culturally and ethically, and this factor has led to the failure of social programmes in handling the underlying factors of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Most development programmes in Calabar Municipality are still traditionally and quantitatively evaluated, for example, by determining the success in terms of economic measures for example, such as income, employment, or improvement of infrastructure. Nevertheless, such approaches do not give much attention to the social and cultural forces that are very instrumental in determining the success of such programmes. As an example, the analysis of a health programme in Calabar, where the success is only measured by the number of clinic visits, can give poor consideration to local health practices, including the use of traditional medicine or spiritual belief in healthcare. In this regard, inadequate integration of cultural knowledge in evaluations may result in the creation of programmes that may not be congruent with the realities on the ground, thereby reducing their overall efficacy (Anderson et al. 2022).

In addition, the ethical concerns related to privacy and confidentiality of data, marginalisation of groups in the course of the evaluation, and so on are not considered in general. Paolanti et al. (2024) state that the lack of ethical principles in the assessment systems can lead to the misuse of community information that, in turn, affects the credibility of the assessment between the local population and the assessment providers. Without the ethical provisions, the appraisal can be unwilling to contribute to social inequalities, stigmatisation, and discrimination, and thereby not promote the effectiveness of social transformation programmes.

The empirical research is conducted in various contexts, whereby it focuses on how cultural and ethical implications are incorporated in the assessment and evaluation practice. It has been established that culturally based measurement is more effective in sub-Saharan Africa to measure the various needs in the communities. A indicatively, a recent study conducted by Mekonnen et al. (2021) in Ethiopia showed that development initiatives that incorporated the use of indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs in the process of their

evaluation indicated a more successful and sustainable development outcome in contrast to those that employed a standards-based international framework. In this study, it was identified that the local communities are supposed to be included in the development and assessment of the programmes as they are the most qualified in knowing their cultural setting and principles.

Similarly, in Ghana, Chae et al. (2020) found that the relevance and effectiveness of the interventions were enhanced through the application of cultural lenses to the evaluation of education programmes. They found that a combination of educators and local communities in building of assessments that reflected the cultural practices was a sure bet to improve the performance of the students. The result adds value to the potential of cultural assimilation in the evaluation in the quest to enhance the effectiveness of educational programmes in such regions as Calabar Municipality, where the local culture and education may differ from the rest of the globe.

Chigozie (2021) carried out research in Nigeria in order to understand how ethical grounds can be applied to health programme analysis in Cross River State. They found that, when morality elements such as informed consent, transparency, and accountability are integrated into the evaluation process, the evaluation process's credibility was increased and more participatory to the community. The use of the ethical assessment practices also helped in fostering trust and certain gaps in the health service provision that would not have been realised when conducting the quantitative assessment. This highlights the importance of considering such ethical aspects to ensure that evaluations are done to incorporate all members of the community, and the vulnerable individuals are also given a voice in the process of evaluation.

It has also been demonstrated that the incorporation of cultural and ethical aspects in the assessment systems will increase the legitimacy and accountability of social programmes. The authors of a study by Sandham et al. (2019) investigated the effectiveness of participatory assessment strategies in enhancing the effectiveness of a social transformation programme in South Africa. Their results showed that the communities in the design and implementation of the assessments had higher chances of meeting the needs of the communities and attaining sustainable results. This paper contributed to the objection to the view that culturally sensitive and ethically based tests are able to greatly enhance the effectiveness of development projects, as they make them contextually appropriate and attentive to the community values.

Though these are positive instances, there is still a little integration of cultural and ethical aspects in assessment systems in Nigeria, and in Calabar Municipality in particular. Although the concept of participatory development has been largely embraced in theory, it is mostly restricted by a lack of resources, insufficient training, and resistance by institutions to change, which limits the application of the concept in local governance and development programmes. Okunade et al. (2023) state that in Calabar Municipality, local government

officials and development practitioners have a high likelihood of struggling to embrace culturally sensitive and ethical assessment practices because of a low level of awareness about the concepts and a deficiency in training on culturally competent assessment practices.

Communication and cultural barriers are some of the issues that impede the process of integrating cultural and ethical aspects of assessment within Calabar Municipality. The insufficient training and awareness of the local government officials, assessors, and community members concerning the significance of these dimensions is one of the major issues. Most development professionals have been using the conventional, one-size-fits-all models in evaluating whether social programmes are working or not. Based on Western evaluation models, they do not take into account local cultural conditions and ethical norms, thereby making them less relevant and useful in the local environment (Boadu 2023).

The other obstacle is the prevalence of quantitative means of data collection in assessment practices. Since quantitative assessments help determine the results, like economic development or availability of services, they cannot be as effective in reflecting the depths of local cultures and issues of morality. This limited view of data that can be measured tends to disregard other significant cultural and ethical variables that can determine the effectiveness of social programmes. According to Baidar and Yar (2025), excessive reliance on quantitative measures without a qualitative explanation of the cultures of the community usually leads to incomplete judgments that cannot be used to determine the underlying causes of social problems.

Further, the Calabar Municipality has no culturally competent assessors. Most local officials and development practitioners do not have the knowledge and skills to know the local cultural values and factor them into the assessment process. This cultural incompetence will in most cases, result in biased assessments that may not accurately portray the local needs and priorities. More so, unaware of the ethical considerations of data collection, the assessor will end up violating the privacy of the people of the community, and thus he or she will further lose the trust of his or her evaluation (Cheng et al. 2024).

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, it is possible to reach a number of opportunities that can contribute to the effectiveness of assessments by incorporating cultural and ethical aspects. An opportunity that is likely to be successful is the integrated approach of participatory evaluation methods, where community members are integrated into the evaluation process. Participatory evaluation also makes sure that the assessments are based on the local values, norms, and practices, and also allows the community members to own the evaluation process. The strategy may be useful to close the gap between external evaluation and the conditions of the local community so that the assessment could be more relevant, culturally competent, and ethical (Anderson et al. 2022).

The other opportunity is the integration of local knowledge systems into the assessment systems. Assessment by incorporating the indigenous knowledge and community-based evaluation will be more representative of the cultural dynamics and social

setting of Calabar Municipality. This strategy will not only increase the topicality of the assessment but will also promote increased involvement in the community, as the local population will find it easier to have confidence in and engage in evaluations that mirror their values and experiences (Haldane et al. 2019). Moreover, informed consent, non-discrimination, and confidentiality are some ethical principles that would help to ensure that assessments are made in a way that would not violate the dignity and rights of every member of the community. Ethical evaluations enhance fairness, transparency, and accountability, which assist in the establishment of trust between society and the evaluators. The given approach also guarantees that vulnerable and marginalised groups will also take a part in the evaluation process and that their voices will be acknowledged and heard (Shevlin and Rose 2022).

Although much study has been conducted on the relevance of incorporating cultural and ethical aspects in assessment practices, the existing gap in practical implementation in social transformation programmes cannot be disregarded since the relevance of culturally and ethically based assessments has been imposed in the literature. The research question to be addressed in the study is the following: Is it possible to consider that the difficulties in the incorporation of the cultural and ethical aspects in the assessment frameworks in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State can be explained by community-related factors (including the local knowledge, cultural traditions, community participation, ethical considerations, and institutional capacity)?

Research hypotheses

- 1) There is no significant influence of cultural and ethical dimensions on the integration of assessment and evaluation in public secondary schools in Calabar.
- 2) There is no significant influence of integrating cultural and ethical considerations on the effectiveness of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar
- 3) The impact of strategies used to improve the effectiveness of culturally and ethically-based assessment and improvement of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar is not significant.

Methodology

The research design that was used in the study was a descriptive survey research design that aimed at exploring the challenges and opportunities in including cultural and ethical aspects of assessment and evaluated in public secondary schools in Calabar, Nigeria. This design was thought to be suitable as it is able to allow systematic data gathering through a representative sample to outline the prevailing conditions, views, and associations among the variables without manipulation of any kind. The sample population was comprised of 2,455 teachers and evaluators in public secondary schools in Calabar, Cross River State. The

sample of 400 respondents was based on the Taro Yamane formula of determining the sample size, which is about 16.3 percent of the entire population. A questionnaire named the Cultural and Ethical Dimensions in Assessment and Evaluation Questionnaire (CEDAEQ) was designed as a structured instrument to collect the data. The questionnaire was designed in three sections that corresponded to the key aims of the research and were measured with the help of a modified four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree 4 points, Agree 3 points, Disagree 2 points, Strongly Disagree 1 point). Three experts in Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Calabar carried out face and content validation of the instrument to ascertain its adequacy and relevance. To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha method was used, and the coefficients obtained were 0.76, 0.81, and 0.84 in the three sections, respectively, which suggests that the instrument has a high degree of internal consistency. The data obtained during the study were analysed by multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses at the level of 0.05.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of cultural and ethical dimensions on the integration of assessment and evaluation in public secondary schools in Calabar

The multiple regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesis. In this analysis, the independent variable was cultural and ethical dimensions, while the dependent variable was the integration of assessment and evaluation frameworks. Both variables were measured on a continuous scale. As presented in Table 1, the result revealed a correlation coefficient ($R = .687$). Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = .471$) indicates that 47.1% of the variance in the integration of assessment and evaluation frameworks can be explained by cultural and ethical dimensions. A review of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) table showed an F-value of 642.020 with a significance level of $p = .000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore concluded that there is a significant influence of cultural and ethical dimensions on the integration of assessment and evaluation in public secondary schools in Calabar

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis of the influence of cultural and ethical dimensions on the integration of assessment and evaluation in public secondary schools in Calabar

Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	9.408	.514		18.291	.000
cultural and ethical dimensions	.603	.024	.687	25.338	.000

F-ratio = 642.020*

$R = .687$

$R^2 = .472$

Adjusted $R^2 = .471$

*Significant at .05 level

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence of integrating cultural and ethical considerations on the effectiveness of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar

To test the hypothesis, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. In this analysis, the independent variable was integrating cultural and ethical considerations, while the dependent variable was the effectiveness of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar. Table 2 showed that the result gave a correlation coefficient ($R = .482$). The adjusted R-squared value ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = .231$) shows that approximately 23.1% of the variance in assessment and evaluation effectiveness can be explained by integrating cultural and ethical considerations. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) produced an F-value of 217.014 with a significance level of $p = .000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore concluded that integrating cultural and ethical considerations significantly influences the effectiveness of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis of the influence of integrating cultural and ethical considerations on the effectiveness of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar

Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	13.246	.621		21.337	.000
integrating cultural and ethical considerations	.402	.021	.482	14.731	.000

F-ratio = 217.014*

$R = .482$

$R^2 = .232$

Adjusted $R^2 = .231$

*Significant at .05 level

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant influence of strategies employed to enhance the effectiveness of culturally and ethically on the improvement of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar.

To test the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of strategies employed to enhance the effectiveness of culturally and ethically responsive practices on the improvement of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar, a multiple regression analysis was carried out. In this analysis, the independent variable was the

strategies employed to enhance cultural and ethical effectiveness, while the dependent variable was the improvement of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar. The outcome of the result, as shown in Table 3, showed a correlation coefficient ($R = .562$). Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = .315$) shows that 31.5% of the variance in assessment and evaluation improvement can be explained by the strategies employed to promote cultural and ethical effectiveness. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) produced an F-value of 331.718 with a significance level of $p = .000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore concluded that the strategies employed to enhance the effectiveness of culturally and ethically responsive practices have a significant influence on the improvement of assessment and evaluation practices in public secondary schools in Calabar

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis of the influence of strategies employed to enhance the effectiveness of culturally and ethically on the improvement of assessment and evaluation practices

Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	10.927	.630		17.347	.000
The strategies employed	.509	.028	.562	18.213	.000

F-ratio = 331.718*

$R = .562$

$R^2 = .316$

Adjusted $R^2 = .315$

*Significant at .05 level

Discussion of findings

This study showed that cultural and ethical aspects play an important part in determining the incorporation of assessment and evaluation models in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. This suggests that cultural values and ethical ideas integrated in the establishment and practice of assessment enhance the applicability, fairness, and inclusivity of evaluation programmes. When assessment practices are provided with local cultural contexts and principles of ethical values, they are more likely to promote equity, transparency, and authenticity when gauging the performance of learners in public secondary schools in Calabar. This finding is in line with the findings of other authors such as Caffer et al. (2024) and Walker et al. (2023) who state that culturally responsive and ethically-based assessment practices come in handy in closing the gap between learners and formal assessment lives and experiences. It also adds up to the argument that assessments are not an objective procedure but a social construct that is influenced by the values and norms of the society where the technique of assessment is created.

The study also discovered that cultural and ethical considerations are issues that can be incorporated in the assessment and evaluation practices in Calabar Municipality. This implies that once ethical concepts such as fairness, honesty, sensitivity to diversity, and sensitivity to culture are prudently instilled by teachers and assessors, the overall performance of the assessment practices would improve. In this regard, effective assessment is not just grading or measurement, but it implies holistic judgment and consideration of the background of learners and moral guidelines in assessment. The discovery concurs with the stance taken by Alnajjar and Abou Hashish (2021), who observed that ethical sensitivity in education enhances the acceptability and reliability of assessment results. It is also aligned with the culturally responsive assessment models that Robertson (2021) suggests, according to which the validity and social credibility of the evaluation processes are much higher when the cultural and ethical aspects are properly integrated into the evaluation process.

The study further determined that the mechanisms used to improve the culturally and ethically-responsive practices have a significant contribution towards improving the assessment and evaluation practices in Calabar Municipality. The latter result highlights the importance of possessing certain strategies, such as assessor capacity-building, policy-making, including community inclusion and contextualisation of assessment tools. Such types of strategies will be able to ensure that cultural and ethical responsiveness is not merely an abstract principle but implemented into practice. The result aligns with the findings of Yeganeh (2024), who observed that institutional backing is very critical in the establishment of culturally sensitive and ethically appropriate systems of evaluation. It is also serving to affirm that learning is possible to achieve major learning and fair evaluation when evaluators take into consideration the socio-cultural realities of teachers and when ethical judgments are applied to their careers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the research, the researchers made a conclusion that cultural and ethical factors apply to the formation of assessment and evaluation in public secondary schools in Calabar. The study, in particular, has shown that cultural and ethical factors play a monumental role in the integration of the assessment and evaluation structure, and the introduction of both factors could enhance the overall performance of the assessment and evaluation practices. In addition, the curriculum employed in consolidating the culturally and ethically responsive practices was found to have an enormous impact in improving the quality, fairness, and inclusiveness of the assessment and evaluation systems. All these outcomes prove the necessity to align educational assessment practice with cultural reality and ethical standards to achieve equity, relevance, and credibility of the evaluation outcomes. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The policies that are supposed to be institutionalised by the educational authorities are those that should develop the cultural and ethical aspects to be included in the assessment and evaluation systems.
2. Teachers and other educational stakeholders should receive regular training on culturally responsive and ethical assessment practices to enhance the validity, fairness, and effectiveness of assessment and evaluation processes in schools.
3. The learning assessment tools and procedures must be culturally diverse and ethical in their reflection of curriculum planners and policymakers of the individual and community ethical values of learners.

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