



### ANALYSIS OF NEED FOR IMPROVING ETHICS AMONG NIGERIAN LEADERS THROUGH ASSESSMENT OF BEHAVIOURAL TRAITS OF UNDERGRADUATES: A CASE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL VALUATION STUDENTS

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#### **Abstract**

*Despite the fact that graduating students at convocations are presented as having been found worthy in character and in learning, assessment of undergraduates in Nigerian universities presently is basically limited to academic learning as marks are awarded for only that*

*aspect while marks are not awarded for*

#### **Keywords:**

*Improving, Ethics, Nigerian Leaders, Assessment, Behavioural, Environmental Valuation Students.*

*ethics or character of the students. With*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

As far back as 1856, Moreau had stated that “Society has a greater need for people of values than it has for scholars” and lately, The US President Theodore Roosevelt is quoted to have said that “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society” (Young, 2020). Warren Buffet is also quoted to have said “Look for three things in a person – intelligence, energy and integrity. If they don’t have the last one, don’t even bother with the first two” (Daily Quotes, 2018). In the present day Nigerian society where the pressure to succeed in a highly competitive and morally lax world appears to make the lure for taking short cuts or deriving short term benefits

*growing concern on questionnaires effects in reducing the level of ethics of administered on 55 cases of ethics and Nigerian leaders most students studying professional of which are university Environmental misconduct upon the graduates, this work Valuation as a stand- students graduating therefore sought to alone course in and becoming leaders analysis the need for Nigerian universities in the profession. The improving ethics as well as 8 Specialist work therefore among Nigerian Lecturers of the recommends that leaders by the Course. The finding universities in Nigeria award marks for the students (77.8%) should begin to award behavioural traits of and Lecturers (100%) marks for behavioural their undergraduates. agreed that assessing undergraduates as a The case study being and awarding marks way of improving Environmental for behavioural traits ethics among Nigerian Valuation students, the can have leaders. work used structured major/moderate*

**S**tronger than being morally right, ethics has become even more essential than ever before. Indeed, ethics has become more important in Nigeria at a time millennials are taking up leading roles in the society with a baggage of major negative traits listed by Times Magazine as selfishness; laziness; getting privileges; computer, technology and internet dependent; technology and materialism-dependent; social media-addicted; fame-oriented; over-confident and less-civic-engaged (Stein, 2013).

As graduates turn out to be leaders in the professions, politics, business, religion, education and other spheres of the Nigerian society, it becomes necessary to search for other ways of inculcating ethics in graduates apart from the traditional ways. The search should include seeing how the universities and other institutions of higher learning that produce them need to adjust their curricular towards improving the level of ethics imbibed by their students. At convocation ceremonies, graduating students are said to have been found “worthy in character and in learning”. This presupposes that the university should train and assess the students in, not only in academics, but also in good behavioural traits (ethics) or character.

Presently, the universities in Nigeria can pretty be sure of the level of academic performance of their graduates because assessment is made on academics. However, the institutions do not have a basis for assuring the outside world of the level of ethical strength of their graduates given the fact that assessment of behavioural traits of students, is not carried out.

This work is aimed at analysing the need for improving ethics in Nigeria through assessment of students' character traits in the overall assessment of undergraduates, focusing on Environmental Valuation undergraduates. This is to be achieved with a singular objective of knowing whether marks should be awarded for character in the overall assessment of Nigerian Environmental Valuation undergraduates. The focus on Environmental Valuation undergraduates is in view of the serious attention the world is giving to issues of the Environment - they that eventually lead in such issues must be seen to be people of high ethical value.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ethics has so many definitions and so, for the purpose of this work, we shall adopt some of its definitions by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “ the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group professional ethics; a guiding philosophy; a set of moral issues or aspects (such as rightness). Character, on the other hand, is defined by the same dictionary, among others, as the complex of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group, or nation.

Ethics and character are therefore used interchangeably and for the purpose of this work mean ability to do morally right things or exhibit moral virtues. Young (2020) lists such moral virtues to “include courage (acting with bravery in fearful situations), justice (acting with fairness towards others by honouring rights and responsibilities), and honesty (being truthful and sincere).”

The importance of these virtues has been shown to supersede the importance of knowledge (Moreau, 1856; Young, 2020; Daily Quotes, 2018). It becomes imperative that leaders who are supposed to be people of character and learning should, apart from showing learning which is basic, also show character. Character is innate but studies have shown that it can also be learned at school (Pereira, 2019; Young, 2020).

For professionals, Chau and McKinnell (2002) had posited that their attitudes and perceptions are often formed at the undergraduate level and Page (2005) suggested socialization of professionals right early from the schools as “the Universities have a role in socialisation that has a long reaching impact on a professionals’ career”. According to Ezema, Oluwatayo, Adewale and Aderonmu (2014), “Unless those being educated to become professionals imbibe the attribute of a disciplined mind in their formative years, it becomes difficult to expect a change later in life”.

Consequently, if efforts are to be taken at improving ethics among leaders in Nigeria, searchlight must be beamed on the place of training on ethics in the overall training given to students of universities and other institutions of higher learning in the Nigeria who are potential leaders in various spheres of the Nigerian society. The cliché at university convocations is that the graduating students have been found worthy in character and in learning. However, the reality is that while the students have been found worthy in learning through the various assessments (examinations, practical work, term papers and oral tests) where marks have been awarded, no assessment is made of the character of the students and therefore no marks were awarded. How can an institution be confident in presenting graduates as “worthy in character” when no assessment was made of the students’ character – no marks awarded?

It is possible to have a curriculum that imbibes in graduates ethics, character and sticking to professional discipline through assessment of character. According to a former President of the General Conference, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Professor Michael Omolewa, a Nigerian curriculum review has become necessary in the need to “.... produce people with character, so that one will not just be looking for money but things that are more than mere financial gains. If you are only chasing money, that is an exercise in futility,

but if you have the fear of God and the value of caring for others, then one will be a happier person....” (TheGuardian newspaper, May25, 2017). This is a view also shared by Kpee, Oluwuo and Baridam (2012) who suggested that “Curriculum should curb moral maladies now embraced by society....” It is in this vein that Ashen and Gambo (2012) showed the importance of incorporating issues of integrity, discipline and high ethical behaviour in the curriculum of Estate Management. Ezema, Oluwatayo, Adewale, and Aderonmu (2014), in agreement, posited that:

*In the light of increasing criticism of the estate surveyors’ services, there is need to examine the curriculum used in the training of real estate students with particular reference to aspects of the curriculum dealing with professional practice. In order for the estate surveyor to perform (show) sic, credibility, a high degree of professionalism is required given the challenges confronting the real estate profession in Nigeria. Such challenges include unethical practices, contentious valuations.....*

The cliché at University Convocations that graduating students have been found worthy in character and learning cannot be true until the present practice of awarding marks for only academic work is changed to a model that includes awarding marks for students’ behaviour (character).

One can argue that assessments on behavioural traits can be difficult as it is subjective and therefore could be subject of abuse by Lecturers and Students. While this argument could be tenable, it has never been right for one to throw away the baby with the bath water (Young, 2020). More so, science and technology which removes bias by operators, is capable of being deployed into such an assessment (Lowe and Laighin, 2014; Eisa and Moreira, 2017; Guesgen and Marsland, editors, 2013). In fact, The University of Cambridge Behavioural Attributes Framework is a computer application already being used by University of Cambridge in the University’s Human Resources Department for testing eight behavioural attributes of employees (University of Cambridge, 2014). One believes that

this or any other developed technology can be adapted for testing students' behavior in schools. The Attendance Register is currently being used in so many schools to monitor class attendance by students (punctuality) but there are abuses such as friends helping their friends to fill out the Attendance sheets. If clocking-in gadgets are used, such abuses will be eliminated.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This work has adopted the cross-sectional research type of design (a survey research approach) as the research is a fact-finding one. Survey research approach used in studying phenomena, situations, problems, attitudes or issues, taking a cross-section of them at one time, is very suitable for the study of opinion poll as this (Babbie, 2013).

### **Research Population and Sampling Design**

Two clusters of population were identified for this research, namely (i) Specialist Lecturers in Environmental Valuation and the related discipline of Land Economics in Nigerian Universities (SL) and (ii) Undergraduates studying Environmental Valuation in Nigerian Universities. As at 2017 when the research was carried out, only Department of Estate Management, Rivers State University was teaching Environmental Valuation as a stand-alone Course. The population of students was therefore limited to the students of the said school. However, only final year students of the school were chosen for the research as it was considered that they are about completing their studies, in which case one can confidently use them to assess the curriculum of their Department. Their population was 55 and the number was retained as the Sample as it was small.

For the Lecturers of Environmental Valuation in Departments of Estate Management, it was necessary to select the Universities they will come from in an unbiased manner. To do this, a sample was taken out of all the 14 Universities shown by the 2017 Directory of the Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (NIESV) to be recognized by the two professional regulatory bodies, namely, NIESV and the Estate Surveyors and Valuers Registration Board of Nigeria (ESVARBON). Reflecting geographical spread, ownership (private or state-owned) as well as age, the following universities were chosen for the research: University of Uyo (UNIUYO), Rivers State University (RSU), University of Nigeria, Nsukka

(UNN); Imo State University (IMSU); University of Lagos (UNILAG); Covenant University, Ota (CU); Federal University of Technology, Minna (FUTMIN); and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi (ATBU). The distribution of the Lecturers is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Breakdown of the Population for Lecturers (L), Departments of Estate Management of Selected Universities, 2017**

*Selected Universities* **Lecturers in Departments of Estate Management (L)**

	Profs	Ass. Profs	Snr. Lec.	Lec-1	Lec-2	Ass. Lec	Grad. Ass.	Total No. of Lectur-ers
<i>UNILUYO</i>	1	0	3	4	4	1	0	13
<i>RSU</i>	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	10
<i>UNN</i>	2	1	2	4	0	0	3	12
<i>IMSU</i>	0	1	0	2	4	1	0	8
<i>UNILAG</i>	2	2	1	2	12	0	3	22
<i>CU</i>	2	3	2	0	4	0	0	11
<i>FUTMIN</i>	0	2	4	3	6	3	0	18
<i>ATBU</i>	0	0	6	3	3	16	2	30
<b>Total</b>	8	10	19	21	35	22	9	124

Source: Compiled by the Researcher (2017).

All the Lecturers were asked the Question: Is Environmental Valuation your area of Specialization? Those that said Yes (a total of 8) became the population of the cohort of Specialist Lecturers (SL) for the research. The 8 were used as sample because the number is few. The questionnaires were distributed to the UGs and SLs and their rates of response are in Table 2.

**Table 2: Rate of Response by the Respondents**

<i>Respondents</i>	Population (PP)	Sample (S)	Questionnaires Returned
<i>Specialist EV Lecturers (SL)</i>	8	8 (100% of Population)	6 (75% of Sample)
<i>Students</i>	55	55 (100% of Population)	36 (65.45% of Sample)

Source: Field Survey (2017)

The composition of the SL who responded, according to their cadres is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Distribution of the Respondent Specialist Environmental Valuation Lecturers (SEVL), 2017**

<i>Cadre</i>	No.	Percentage
<i>Professors</i>	2	33.33
<i>Associate Professors</i>	3	50.00
<i>Senior Lecturers</i>	1	16.67
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Survey (2017)

Table 3 shows that Professors accounted for 33.33% of the SL, Associate Professors 50% and Senior Lecturers, 16.67%. The statistics shows high calibre Lecturers specialised in Environmental Valuation and the related discipline of Land Economics. Their views are considered to be reliable enough for issues of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) of Environmental Valuation in Nigeria.

#### Units of Data

The Primary Data Units and their bases of measurement are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Data Units and their Bases of Measurement**

<i>Data Unit</i>	Basis of Measurement
<i>The effect of awarding marks for students' behavioural traits on reduction of cases of ethics and professional misconduct upon the students graduating and becoming practitioners</i>	Opinions of Undergraduates studying Environmental Valuation (UG) and Specialist Lecturers of Environmental Valuation/Land Economics (SL)

#### Research Variables

The research variables of this work are set out in Table 5.

**Table 5: Research Variables and their Sources**

<i>Data Unit</i>	Basis of Measurement
<i>Level of effect of awarding marks for students' behavioural traits on reduction of cases of ethics and professional misconduct upon</i>	Opinions of Undergraduates studying Environmental Valuation (UG) and Specialist Lecturers of Environmental

*students graduating and becoming practitioners* Valuation/Land (SL) Economics

**Techniques of Data Analysis**

The data obtained were analysed using simple percentages.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

To confirm whether awarding marks for students’ behavioural traits has effect on reduction of cases of ethics and professional misconduct among professionals, questions were posed in the questionnaires for both undergraduates (UG) and Specialist Lecturers (SL) on how awarding marks for students’ behavioural traits can affect reduction in cases of ethics and professional misconduct upon the students graduating and becoming practitioners. Responses were received as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Response of SL and SS on their view on how awarding marks for students’ behavioural traits can affect reduction in cases of ethics and professional misconduct upon the students graduating and becoming practitioners.**

		No effect	Minor effect	Neutral	Moderate effect	Major effect
<i>1. 2007 BMAS for Estate management stipulates that "Candidates should be able to display honesty, integrity, devotion to professional work professional discipline and good human relation. Also maintain the dignity, carriage and demeanour</i>	<b>SL</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
	<b>SS</b>	0 (0%)	2 (5.6%)	6 (16.7%)	4 (11.1%)	24 (66.7%)

*in consonance with the profession of estate surveying and valuation and relate with the clientele effectively in a professional respect". Please indicate to what extent you think that assessing and awarding marks for these behavioural traits can affect reduction in cases of ethics and professional misconduct upon the students graduating and becoming leaders in the profession.*

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From Table 6, majority of SL (100%) and SS (77.8%) are agreed that awarding marks for students' behavioural traits can affect reduction in cases of ethics and professional misconduct upon the students graduating and becoming leaders in the profession.

**DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The present assessment model whereby no marks are awarded for behavioural traits of students has been faulted as majority of the respondents favour an assessment model that awards marks for behavioural traits of students. These views confirm Chau and McKinnell (2002) which showed that attitudes and perceptions of future professionals are often formed from their undergraduate level and Page (2005) who suggested socialization of professionals right early from the

schools as “the Universities have a role in socialisation that has a long reaching impact on a professionals’ career”. This also tallies with the position of Ezema, Oluwatayo, Adewale and Aderonmu (2014) that aspects of the curriculum dealing with professional practice in the curriculum for training professional estate surveyors in Nigeria must be tinkered with, for improvement in the credibility of the estate surveyors’ services in the light of increasing criticism of their services.

Ethics has become an outstanding issue in leadership, not only in Nigeria but also globally and the best stage to inculcate it, is not after the formative years but during the formative years of undergraduate study. The cliché of awarding degree certificates to persons found worthy in character and learning must be made to have meaning by ensuring that the graduates while in school are not just assessed in learning but also in character.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has shown that it has become imperative to start awarding marks for behavioural traits (character) of undergraduates of Nigerian universities if the much-needed ethics is to be seen in Nigerian professionals.

We therefore recommend that assessment of students of Environmental Valuation (and indeed, all students) in Nigerian universities should not be based on only assessment of learning but should include assessment of behavioural traits (character). National Universities Commission (NUC) should therefore review the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) in Nigeria to achieve this.

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