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Innovative assessment techniques and their impact on student engagement and retention in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of assessment practices on student engagement, academic performance, and retention in higher education. It highlights the significant role of assessment in shaping student learning behaviours. The study adopted a Positivist research paradigm with a research design. The HEI surveyed comprises four campuses, and a stratified random sampling was applied to select a total of 660 students, all year three students only. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to perform descriptive analysis for the study. Findings indicated that effective assessment practices influence motivation, confidence, and academic success. Female students were found to value academic and non-academic program aspects more than male students, while satisfaction with assessment techniques varied based on funding sources, with self-financed and scholarship students being the most sensitive. The study stresses the importance of aligning assessment methods with learning objectives, providing meaningful feedback, and adopting diverse, inclusive, and ethical approaches to assessment. Recommendations include enhancing transparency, fostering reflective learning, and integrating assessment into institutional strategies to support diverse student needs and improve retention rates. The findings highlight the need for continuous evaluation and development of assessment practices to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in higher education.

Keywords: Assessment Practices; Student Engagement; Student Retention; Higher Education; Learning Outcomes

1. Introduction

In the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world, fostering student engagement and improving retention rates have become critical priorities. The transformative power of education lies in delivering knowledge and inspiring students to actively participate in their learning journeys (Tight, 2020). However, traditional assessment methods which is characterised by rigidity and a one-size-fits-all approach are increasingly being challenged for their inability to fully engage students or reflect their diverse abilities and learning styles (Terblanche, van Rooyen & Enwereji, 2024). In response to these challenges, innovative assessment techniques have emerged as dynamic tools to bridge the gap between student engagement and institutional success. These methods encourage active participation, collaboration, and critical thinking which makes learning more interactive and meaningful (Veluvali & Surisetti, 2022). As institutions adopt these approaches, they create more inclusive environments that cater to the varied needs of their diverse student populations.

Innovative assessment techniques are modern, flexible methods designed to evaluate the knowledge, skills and abilities of the students in ways that promote engagement, creativity, and critical thinking, moving beyond traditional tests and exams (Aljawarneh, 2020). Examples include project-based assessments, peer evaluations, e-portfolios, gamified assessments, and real-world problem-solving tasks that align with diverse learning styles and practical applications (Vaithianathan, Subbulakshmi, Boopathi & Mohanraj, 2024). Innovative assessment techniques encompass a wide range of methods designed to move beyond conventional exams and essays, focusing instead on creative, interactive, and student-centred approaches. These techniques can also include formative assessments, gamification, peer reviews, e-portfolios, and project-based learning, among others (Dighliya, 2025). Through the incorporation of real-world applications, collaborative tasks, and technology-driven solutions, these methods assist in providing students with more meaningful learning experiences and enhance their motivation to actively engage with course materials (Maqsood et al., 2024). Furthermore, these techniques align closely with the principles of active learning, where students take ownership of their educational journey, fostering deeper cognitive and emotional connections to the content.

The impact of these innovative assessment methods extends beyond mere academic performance. Research suggests that students who are engaged through inclusive assessment practices are more likely to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, which are essential for success in both academic and professional contexts (Maqsood et al., 2024; Dighliya, 2025; Aljawarneh, 2020). Moreover, such methods contribute significantly to student retention by creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment. When students feel that their strengths and progress are recognised

and valued, they are more likely to remain committed to their studies and persist through academic challenges (Veluvali & Surisetti, 2022). As higher education continues to adapt to the demands of a globalised and technologically advanced world, the role of innovative assessment techniques in shaping student engagement and retention cannot be overstated. Educators could unlock the full potential of their students by embracing creative and inclusive approaches, also ensuring that higher education remains a transformative force for individuals and society alike. Considering this background, this study investigates the nexus between innovative assessment methods and their measurable impact on student engagement and retention in a high institution in South Africa. This will assist in providing valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers to ensure that students are equitably retained in the South African HEIs.

2. Problem statement

Advancements in technology and shifting student expectations in the higher education sector have revealed the shortcomings of traditional assessment methods in promoting meaningful engagement and ensuring student retention (Terblanche et al., 2024). Conventional techniques such as rote memorisation and standardised testing often fail to accommodate diverse learning styles or equip students with the skills needed to traverse their real-world challenges (Meinel, Friedrichsen, Staubitz, Reinhard & Köhler, 2024). This disconnect has contributed to declining student engagement, a critical factor influencing academic success, retention, and long-term employability. At the same time, higher education institutions face mounting pressure to improve student experiences and outcomes, particularly due to rising dropout rates and concerns about graduate preparedness for the job market (Mbatha, 2024). More so, Mbatha (2024) asserts that innovative assessment techniques have demonstrated potential to enhance engagement and retention in the South African context.

Schutte (2024a) affirms that the adoption of these innovative assessments remains inconsistent across institutions in South Africa due to entrenched traditional practices, a lack of institutional support and limited empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness. Despite the growing body of literature highlighting the benefits of innovative assessments (Tight, 2020; Djumabayevna, 2024; Terblanche et al., 2024), significant gaps persist in understanding their specific impact within diverse higher education contexts (Schutte, 2024a). Traditional assessment practices, often embedded in institutional policies, hinder the transition to more inclusive and dynamic approaches. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive frameworks to evaluate the success of these techniques poses challenges for educators and administrators seeking to implement transformative changes (Schutte, F., 2024b). The integration of creative and inclusive assessment methods presents an opportunity to enhance student engagement, reduce attrition, and promote holistic academic development (Terblanche et al., 2024). Without addressing these gaps, institutions risk perpetuating disengagement and attrition, undermining their

mission to serve as transformative forces for individual and societal progress. In this regard, this study seeks to address these challenges by investigating the nexus between innovative assessment techniques and their measurable impact on student engagement and retention in higher education. It aims to provide evidence-based insights into best practices and offer practical recommendations for educators, administrators, and policymakers striving to create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

3. Constructivist Learning Theory

The origins of constructivist learning theory can be traced back to the works of prominent theorists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey (Mohammed & Kınyo, 2020). Piaget introduced the idea of cognitive development stages and suggested that learners construct knowledge through assimilation and accommodation. Vygotsky expanded on this by stressing the role of social interaction and cultural context in learning, particularly through his concept of the "zone of proximal development" (Hedegaard, 2012). Dewey, a pioneer in experiential learning, argued for education that focuses on real-world problem-solving and student engagement, laying the foundation for modern constructivist approaches. Constructivist learning theory posits that learners actively construct their knowledge and understanding based on their experiences and interactions with the world (Chuang, 2021; Sasan & Rabillas, 2022). Hedegaard (2012) affirms that it challenges the traditional view of learning as a passive process of absorbing information, emphasising instead that learning is an active, dynamic process of meaning-making. The theory encourages educators to create environments that foster exploration, collaboration, and critical thinking which enables the students to build their knowledge through hands-on activities and reflection (Sasan & Rabillas, 2022).

According to Hof (2021) and Clark (2018) constructivist learning theory is built on several key concepts such as active learning, scaffolding, and social interaction. Active learning stresses the role of the learner as an active participant in their educational journey, engaging in problem-solving, inquiry, and experimentation. Scaffolding refers to the support provided by educators or peers to help learners progress beyond their current level of understanding, which is gradually removed as the learner gains independence. Social interaction, as emphasised by Vygotsky, highlights the importance of collaboration and dialogue in shaping knowledge, recognising that learning is often co-constructed within a community. Furthermore, the theory highlights the importance of contextual learning, where learners relate new information to their prior knowledge and real-life experiences (Muhajirah, 2020). This concept aligns closely with innovative assessment techniques, as these methods often integrate authentic, real-world tasks that resonate with the experiences of students and their future goals.

The selection of this theory to underpin this study is deemed appropriate as it promotes active participation and critical thinking. Innovative assessments align with the constructivist principle of

active learning, empowering students to take ownership of their educational journey. Techniques such as project-based assessments, gamification, and e-portfolios encourage students to engage deeply with content and foster meaningful learning experiences that enhance retention (Veluvali & Surisetti, 2022). Moreover, constructivism encourages social interaction and collaboration, which are often integral to innovative assessments. Peer reviews, group projects, and collaborative problem-solving tasks provide opportunities for students to learn from each other, building a sense of community and belonging factors which are essential for student retention. The theory also supports the inclusion of diverse, real-world tasks in assessments, ensuring that they are not only engaging but also relevant to students' academic and career aspirations. The application of constructivist learning theory to this study can transform educational practices in higher education by shifting the focus from rote memorisation to active exploration and contextual understanding. This alignment with constructivist principles can enhance engagement and encourage students to persist in their studies, thereby improving retention rates.

4. The context of assessment techniques in HEIs

Assessment of student learning is the most important function of HEIs, and it is a way in which institutions assure and express academic standards and has a significant impact on student behaviour and their future lives. Hebblethwaite (2010) defines assessment as a process to know the students and the quality of their learning. The South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) (2001:15) defines assessment in education and training as being the collection of evidence of learners' work so that judgments about the learners' achievements or non-achievements can be made and decisions arrived at. Since approximately the mid-1980s, there has been increasing pressure on institutions of higher education to be accountable to the government, accreditation agencies, the public, as well as students and their parents, by taking responsibility for and demonstrating the effectiveness of their educational programme (Suskie, 2018). However, the effectiveness of education programmes is dependent on how well lecturers understand the role of assessment in student learning and how well they are prepared to change their strategy in such a way that they use assessment as a tool for the improvement of student learning (Brown, Bull & Pendlebury, 2013). Dolin, Black, Harlen and Tiberghien (2018) define two types of assessment as summative assessment and formative assessment. Summative assessment has an aim to: “determine the success or failure only after a student’s performance”, and formative assessment “intends to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and guide students toward the achievement of learning goals during the learning process”. The importance of formative assessment as stressed by Dixson and Worrell (2016) signifies that formative assessment is critical to student learning and retention. Assessment has a major influence on what learners learn, how effectively they learn and consequently on the quality of their learning (Earl, 2012). To achieve this, appropriate and diversified approaches or forms of assessment practices must be applied.

4.1 Formative Assessments

Woyessa, et al (2013) and Gezer, Wang, Polly, Martin, Pugalee and Lambert (2021) define formative assessment as an assessment that takes place during the process of learning and teaching. According to SAQA (SAQA, 2001:26), the main purposes of formative assessments are, to support the teaching and learning process; to assist in the planning of future learning; to diagnose the learner's strength and weakness; to provide feedback to the learner on his/her progress and to make decisions on the readiness of learners to do a summative assessment, and it is developmental. However, this form of assessment cannot be used to award credit or certificates. Furthermore, Dixson and Worrell (2016) point out that students need to learn to take over the role of formative assessment by monitoring themselves as they learn.

Formative assessment is also linked with students' learning processes as it helps to guide them in their studies, motivates them and provides feedback on areas of learning requiring further work, and generally promotes the desired learning outcome. Research information on formative assessment by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) identify some principles of good feedback practice, which was defined as anything that might strengthen the students' capacity to self-regulate their performance. These practices are useful in the sense that they helps clarify what good performance is; facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning; delivers high quality information to students about their learning; encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning; encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem; provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance; and provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching. Wiliam et al. (2017) and Dolin et al. (2018) concur with the above statements by highlighting the importance of formative assessment for the purpose of feedback to motivate students and to inform them how to improve their knowledge base, understanding, and problem-solving skills.

4.2 Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is a type of assessment that takes place at the end of the time allocated for the programme, course or qualification. It is still part of the learning process but differs from formative assessment regarding the time it occurs within the learning process (Gezer et al., 2021). On the same token, the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA, 2001) indicates that the purpose of summative assessment is to make a judgment about the achievement of a learner at the end of a programme of learning. According to Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis and Arter (2020), the primary purpose of assessment is to be summative. In its summative role, the purpose of assessment is to judge the quality and characteristics of the student and summarise these in a clear and widely acceptable format (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Traditionally, the principal mechanism for summative assessment is the end-of-module examination. Summative assessment is assumed to help employers by providing 'costless'

information on the productive potential of job applicants (Kibble, 2017). It is also a mechanism for selecting students for post-compulsory education and may be a factor in the reputation and financial security of institutions in higher education. Students care most about the results of summative assessment, as it impacts employability and prospective earnings.

Whilst most assessments are both summative and formative, it is argued that the summative function increasingly predominates in a way that adversely affects student learning (Wiliam & Thompson, 2017). Assessment also contributes to evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of modules and improving the quality of learning delivery. Kibble (2017) points out that assessment has a powerful effect on what students do and how they do it. It further communicates to them what they can and cannot succeed in doing and builds or undermines their confidence, as learners on a course and in the future, in the world.

4.3 The purpose of assessment

According to Woyessa (2013), there are three main purposes of assessment, namely to give license to proceed to the next stage or graduation; to classify the performance of students in rank order; and to improve their learning. McColloch (2007) identified a variety of reasons for assessing, and these are summarised in Table 1 below. Table 1 shows that the purposes of assessment are many, varied and related. It is important to realise that to set an assessment task for one or more of these purposes and then to assume that the results are appropriate for other purposes may not be true. There are also different stakeholders in assessment, and one needs to be aware that concerns are not always mutually compatible; for example, what is appropriate for a student in helping to learn may not yield information appropriate for an employer.

Table 1: Purpose of Assessment

For Students	To provide feedback, to promote learning, to diagnose (at commencement, during or at end, readiness, to proceed, strengths and weaknesses), to motivate, and to provide a profile of what has been learned from teachers.
For teachers	To establish a level of achievement (summative), to pass or fail a student, to grade a student, to establish progress, to determine extent to which course/module aims and objectives/outcomes have been achieved, to provide feedback on effectiveness and other aspects of learning environments, to licence to practice, to predict success in future courses, and to predict success in employment, to select for future employment. The last three may also apply to 'Society'
For society	Credibility (select for entry into employment, further training), monitoring standards (accountability), to determine whether a student is safe to 'practice', to make the course / module appear 'respectable' and creditworthy to other institutions and employers.

Source: McCulloch (2007)

The above table shows that assessment is beneficial to students, to the teacher and to society. Improvement of learning methods results in better performance by the student. Pressure on instructors to diversify learning aims and assessment procedures also comes from students themselves in a competitive labour market. Earl (2012) thinks that tension in assessment lies between assessment to provide feedback and help students to learn, and assessment for the purpose of establishing the level of achievement. On the other hand, forms of assessment which are best suited to helping the learning process may well be seen to be unreliable when it comes to judging summative achievement (Kuh et al., 2015). It is often the latter which influences the choice of assessment practice, often to the detriment of supporting student learning and engendering an instrumental focus on assessment on the part of students.

Assessment plays a critical role in shaping the instructional process by providing continuous observation, monitoring, and interaction within the classroom (Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, Bruna & Herrera-Seda, 2018). It enables instructors to determine the progress of lessons and whether students are grasping concepts through responses, interactions, and engagement during learning activities. Effective assessment aligns with curriculum and instruction, ensuring both work in harmony to achieve learning objectives (Martin, Ritzhaupt, Kumar & Budhrani, 2019). Furthermore, Kibble (2017) affirms that assessment helps diagnose learning difficulties by identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing instructors to plan instruction that builds on strengths while addressing areas of improvement. Klusmann, Richter and Lüdtke (2016) emphasise that meaningful assessment practices, combined with timely feedback and follow-up tasks, significantly enhance student learning outcomes.

Beyond academic performance, assessment influences student motivation, self-concept, and self-efficacy (Mikre, 2010). It directs students toward instructional priorities, encourages good study habits, and provides feedback on their progress. Assessment results, derived from various activities such as tests, projects, and assignments, are instrumental for grading and guiding students in their academic journey (Bender, 2023). Early diagnostic and achievement data enable instructors to provide tailored assistance which can improve the learning and performance of students. This study posits that effective assessment methods improve academic outcomes and impact students' decisions to remain in higher education. Retention is closely linked to academic success, as students are more likely to stay when they perform well during their studies.

4.4 Types of assessments in higher education

The main aim of assessment at the classroom level is to ensure that students know what and how well they are learning and performing. In addition, an assessment of learning outcomes is to provide feedback to students and teachers to improve the efficacy of their work (UNESCO, 2006). Learning assessment also provides feedback to educators, parents, policy makers, and the public about the

effectiveness of educational services (Stephens & Moskowitz, 2004). Assessment has a major influence on what learners learn, how effectively they learn and consequently on the quality of their learning. To achieve this, appropriate and diversified approaches or forms of assessment practices must be applied. In various institutions of higher learning, assessments fall into one of two categories, namely examinations or coursework. Table 2 below gives a summary of the types of approaches that have been used for both examinations and coursework.

Table 2: Categories of assessments

Examinations	Unseen Paper (standard exam), Open Book (students can take books in to refer to), Seen Paper (students are given the paper before the exam), Single essay exam (three hours on prepared topic), Take-away Paper (students are given 2/3 days in which to do exam), Oral exam, OSCE (clinical settings), Essay questions; short answer questions; practical and other performance testing approaches; objective questions e.g. multiple choice, true/false statements, matching statements, etc.
Coursework	Project reports, Field work reports, Laboratory reports, Portfolios, Reflective logs, Group work/group projects, Presentations, Essays, reports, critical reviews, Articles, Reaction papers (short critical reviews of course reading undertaken regularly throughout course), Question setting (student task is to set questions or design task most appropriate to assessing the subject), Objective questions, Short answer questions, Practicals, Dissertations, Production of a video, Production of a magazine/newsletter/exhibition/play **Etc.**

Adapted from Mc Culloch (2007)

As indicated in Table 2, assessment in higher education can broadly be categorised into examinations and coursework, each serving distinct purposes. Examinations, often traditional in format, include multiple-choice tests, true/false questions, short answers, and essays. They are widely used, especially at the postgraduate level, to evaluate knowledge recall and higher-order thinking skills. While essays are effective for assessing complex skills, their scoring can be time-consuming and subjective, though rubrics can mitigate this. True/false and short-answer questions are easy to administer but may promote surface learning and risk inaccuracies due to guessing.

Coursework, encompassing performance-based assessments such as portfolios, projects, and problem-solving tasks, is more aligned with deep learning and authentic assessment principles. These methods allow students to demonstrate understanding through real-world applications and creative outputs. For instance, portfolios document learning progress or mastery of objectives, while projects integrate problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills. Although coursework encourages engagement and skill development, challenges such as time demands, groupwork dynamics, and fairness in peer

assessments can arise. However, combining these approaches can provide a comprehensive evaluation of student abilities while addressing diverse learning needs.

5. Research methods

This study investigates the nexus between innovative assessment methods and their measurable impact on student engagement and retention in a high institution in South Africa. The study further explores whether the choice of assessment methods used by the institution contributes to poor student performance and influences their decision to drop out. The researcher is of the view that both teaching methods and assessment methods should be aligned to ensure that the desired learning is achieved. The study adopted a Positivist research paradigm and a descriptive quantitative research design. These techniques promote objective reality and empirical evidence as results are observed and measured through collected data (Creswell, 2014). The population of the study involves a HEI situated in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, having four campuses (A, B, C, D) in the same province. The HEI caters for a wide range of students from diverse backgrounds and programmes. The study only investigated the third-year students from various faculties across all campuses. Using a stratified random sampling, a total of 660 students were selected for the study. To investigate the research problem, a hypothesis was stated thus:

Ha: There is no relationship between innovative assessment methods and student satisfaction/retention.

The study adopted self-administered questionnaires as the only source of primary data collection, where closed-ended questions were posed to the respondents to express their views on the assessment methods used. The questionnaire was carefully developed based on the study's objectives and a thorough review of relevant literature to ensure content validity. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants to refine the questions and enhance clarity. Feedback from the pilot test was used to improve the instrument, ensuring that it accurately captured the variables of interest. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency, with a threshold of 0.7 or higher considered acceptable. The collected questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences **(SPSS)** software. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and means were computed to summarise the data. Inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study's hypotheses and explore relationships between variables. The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants were provided with informed consent forms explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique identifiers to

questionnaires and securely storing data. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring participants' privacy. The study ensured both reliability and validity in its methods. Reliability was addressed using standardised and pre-tested instruments, with Cronbach's alpha used to confirm internal consistency. Validity was established through careful instrument design, expert review, and pilot testing to ensure the questionnaire measured what it intended to assess. Additionally, triangulation with relevant literature supported the robustness of the instrument.

6. Research results

The research's intention is to investigate the relationship between the students' perception of assessment and their satisfaction. The study also sought to determine to what extent the students' perception of assessment techniques impacts their decision to stay at the university. The impact of assessment was observed through several items, including fairness, guidelines, assessment techniques, understanding and feedback. To determine the relationship of the observed variables, the study used a Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis to find out the relationship between a predictor variable of assessment and the target variable of student satisfaction. The results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Showing Relationship between Students' Assessment Techniques and Students' Satisfactions

Variables	N	Mean	Std. D	r	Sig.	Remark
Students' Assess. Tech	648	32.796	6.196			
				.733	.000	Significant
Students' Satisfaction	648	167.849	33.689			

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between students' assessment techniques and students' satisfaction ($r = 0.73$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is rejected. The positive relationship implies that better student assessment techniques bring about an increase in student satisfaction and vice versa. This means that among all other possible factors that influence student satisfaction assessment techniques, it explains 73% of student satisfaction.

A t-test on demographic variables of gender, campuses, residential status and source of funding was performed to establish their relationship with assessment techniques. The results are presented in Tables 4 to 7. Table 4 shows the findings between gender and the students' level of satisfaction with assessment techniques.

Table 4: Difference between male and female students satisfaction with assessment techniques

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.	Remark
Satisfaction with Students' Ass.	Male	257	32.1790	5.72746	-2.083	648	.038	Sig.
	Female	393	33.2112	6.45184				

Table 4 reveals that gender has a significant influence on students' satisfaction with assessment techniques ($t = 2.08$; $df = 648$; $p<0.05$), where female students have a higher satisfaction mean score (33.21) than male students (32.18). This concludes that female students perceived that satisfaction with the assessment technique strongly impacts their decision to stay within the institution as compared to male students.

Table 5 represents the t-test results performed to show the impact of campus on student satisfaction with assessment techniques.

Table 5: Influence of Campus on satisfaction with assessment techniques

Campus		N	Mean	Stt. D	F	Df	Sig.	Remark
Satisfaction with Students' Assessment	Buffalo city	167	33.2156	6.21514	.719	3, 646	.541	NS
	Butterworth	125	32.1680	5.94564				
	N.M.D.	332	32.8042	6.24869				
	Queestown	26	33.1923	6.56670				

Table 5 shows that campus has no significant influence on satisfaction with students' assessment techniques ($F_{(3, 646)} = 0.72$; $p>0.05$). This implies that the level of satisfaction with the assessment technique was not determined by the campus where the student is located.

Table 6 below represents the t-test results performed to show the impact of residential status on student satisfaction with assessment techniques.

Table 6: Influence of Residential Status on student assessment techniques

	Res. Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig.	Remark
	on campus	323	33.1084	6.19988	1.239	647	.216	NS

Satisfaction about Students' Assmt.	off campus	326	32.5061	6.18720				

Table 6 reveals that residential status has no significant influence on students' assessment techniques ($t = 1.24$; $df = 647$; $p>0.05$). This concludes that students' level of satisfaction with assessment techniques was not determined by their residential status. The students perceived that the level of satisfaction with assessment techniques influences their decision to stay within the institution, irrespective of whether they reside on campus or off campus.

A t-test was also performed to establish the impact of sources of funding on student satisfaction levels with assessment techniques. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Influence of source of funding on assessment techniques

		N	Mean	Stt. D	F	Df	Sig.	Remark
Satisfaction with students' assessment	personal loan	19	30.3684	5.38734	2.991	5, 644	.011	Sig.
	Scholarship	81	34.7654	4.89967				
	NSFAS	472	32.7436	6.28279				
	self-financed	21	32.7619	4.67873				
	parent/relatives	42	31.6429	7.08079				

Table 7 reveals that source of funding has significant influence on student satisfaction with student assessment ($F_{(5, 644)} = 2.99$; $p<0.05$) where students on self-financed have the highest mean score (29.29) followed by students on scholarship (29.23), followed by those on parents/relatives (28.38) followed by students on NSFAS (28.05), followed by those on personal loan (27.05) while those on undisclosed source of funding have the lowest mean score (25.87). This implies that the student's level of satisfaction with assessment techniques will also be influenced by the source of funding received by the student.

7. Discussion of research results

The study shows that there is a significant positive relationship between students' assessment techniques and students' satisfaction ($r = 0.73$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between student assessment technique and student satisfaction is not supported. This means that 73 per cent of students perceived that satisfaction with assessment techniques will influence their decisions to stay within the institution. The results further indicate that satisfaction with assessment techniques between the demographic variables of gender and source of funding differs,

except for campus and residential status. The result indicates that female students are more sensitive with respect to efficient assessment techniques compared to male students.

The previous study by Grebennikov and Skainnes (2007) supports these findings, indicating that female students place greater importance on a majority of academic and non-academic aspects of their program compared to male students. It is suggested that female students make greater use of university services and value higher education more than male students. At the selected university, there are more female students than male students. Satisfaction with assessment techniques is reported to be influenced by the source of funding received by students. The study shows that self-financed students are more sensitive to assessment techniques, followed by scholarship students, NSFAS recipients, students with personal loans, and those with undisclosed forms of funding. This is because assessment is the primary means of determining student performance and progress, and most funding aids are based on student progress. Consequently, the administration of financial aid to university students has been shown to facilitate student success (Moodley & Singh, 2015).

The findings further support the notion that assessment significantly impacts student learning by strongly influencing how students engage with their studies. Assessment signals to students what their lecturers regard as important and, therefore, what they should focus on. It acts as an incentive to study and shapes the way students approach their learning. Djumabayevna (2024) emphasises that assessment profoundly affects students' actions and confidence, influencing what they believe they can succeed in achieving. A properly conducted assessment should enable students to reflect and engage in independent learning, providing them with both the confidence and skills needed to act on feedback and improve their future performance. However, research by Schutte (2024a) reveals that as students progress through their studies, they often become dissatisfied with and cynical about assessment practices, viewing them as unfair and punitive.

Previous researchers highlight the importance of assessment as a diagnostic tool to identify learning difficulties and provide feedback about the success of a study program (Brown et al., 2013; Suskie, 2018; Chappuis et al., 2020). Assessment helps instructors identify students' strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to plan instruction to build on strengths and address weaknesses in both formal and informal ways. Kuh et al. (2015) and Wiliam, D. and Thompson (2017) stress that aligning student tasks with learning goals, providing timely and meaningful feedback, and offering targeted follow-up work are essential for effective assessment. The study also supports Dixson and Worrell (2016) and Bender (2023) views that assessment can be helpful when it provides feedback that instructors and students can use to track progress and adjust teaching strategies to meet learning needs. This approach, referred to

as "assessment for learning," emphasises using assessment evidence to adapt teaching to address learning difficulties effectively.

Assessment is a core function of higher education as it ensures academic standards and significantly impacts student behaviour, staff workload, university reputation, and students' future lives. Martin et al. (2019) note that while students may overlook teaching, they cannot ignore assessment, as it is integral to achieving qualifications. From the perspective of Constructivist Learning Theory, assessment should not merely evaluate knowledge recall but actively engage students in constructing their understanding through meaningful, real-world tasks (Mohammed & Kınyo, 2020). This aligns with the need for clear assessment guidelines to ensure learning is facilitated rather than hindered. Driscoll and Cordero De Noriega (2006) emphasise that effective assessment should define program goals, embed assessment in campus discussions, support diverse learning abilities, and align with institutional capacity. Constructivism further supports this by advocating assessments that encourage critical thinking, collaboration, and the application of knowledge in authentic contexts. Suskie (2004) stresses that good assessment practices should provide useful and truthful information, be fair to all students, protect privacy, be systematic, and justify the time and resources invested, all of which are critical for creating an inclusive and transformative learning environment where students actively engage in and take ownership of their educational journey.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study stresses the transformative potential of well-designed assessment practices in HEIs. To effectively support student engagement and retention, HEIs must prioritise the development of fair, transparent, and inclusive assessment frameworks that align with learning objectives and respond to the diverse needs of students. Assessment should not only evaluate performance but also serve as a tool for fostering motivation, confidence, and independent learning. Institutions can create an environment where students are empowered to succeed by integrating meaningful feedback and aligning assessments with both academic goals and financial aid considerations. Addressing the challenges of dissatisfaction and scepticism toward assessment requires a commitment to continuous improvement and the adoption of innovative approaches that enhance the learning experience. Finally, institutions can ensure a more equitable, effective, and impactful learning journey for all students by placing assessment at the heart of educational strategies.

9. Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of assessment practices and support student engagement and retention, institutions should adopt diverse and inclusive methods, such as examination and coursework-based approaches to address the varied learning styles and needs of students. These methods should align

closely with curriculum learning objectives to help students focus their efforts effectively. Providing timely and actionable feedback is essential to guide students in identifying their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering academic growth. Transparent and fair assessment practices, supported by clear guidelines and rubrics, can reduce biases and ensure that students perceive the process as equitable. Furthermore, institutions should train educators in designing and implementing ethical, inclusive, and effective assessments. Assessment practices must protect student privacy, accommodate diverse abilities, and be regularly reviewed to ensure alignment with institutional goals and stakeholder feedback. Academic advisors and instructors should also be aware of the connection between assessment outcomes and financial aid to guide students in meeting academic and funding requirements. Promoting reflective and independent learning, embedding assessment into institutional conversations, and maintaining continuous improvement mechanisms will ensure assessments remain relevant, ethical, and effective in fostering student success and retention.

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