

Causes of Poor Performance in West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) in Nigeria

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Abstract: This is a review paper that centered on poor academic performance generally in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination which has become a great concern to various stakeholders in the educational sector, most especially in Nigeria. The paper argued that mass failure of students in public examinations could be traced to several factors that can be compartmentalized into the domains of parents, students, teachers, schools, the language of instruction, government and the society among others. In other words, the causes of mass failure of students in public examinations are multi-dimensional in nature. The paper concluded that mass failure of students in public examinations constitutes wastage on investment in secondary education. The paper recommended that since academic performance is a virile instrument to the national development of any nation; all concerned stakeholders must be responsive to their roles in order to restore hope to the current grotesque academic performance of students in WAEC in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poor performance, West Africa School Certificate Examination (WASCE), Academic performance

INTRODUCTION

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is an examination board formed out of concern for educational development in Nigeria and West Africa at large.[13]noted that the council has developed a team of well trained and highly-motivated staff that conducts examinations at local and international levels. In 1948, a meeting was held to discuss the future policy of education in West Africa; at the meeting Dr. George Barker Jeffery was appointed to visit some West Africa countries such as Sierra Leone, Gambia and Nigeria; at the end of the visit, Jeffery's recommendation for the establishment of WAEC in 1952 was adopted[53].

Pathetically, shameful failure in students' academic performance in Nigeria is no longer news in the recent years. This[12] axiomatically noted in the public's unhappiness which becomes more prominent following the annual release of the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination results, since the student outcomes do not match the government and parental investments both at the senior secondary schools and tertiary institutions. The situation is so pathetic that stakeholders keep on wondering why this level of education has persistently failed to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the society.

Table 1: percentage of students who passed with 5 credits including English and math

Year	Percentage of pass
2006	22
2007	20
2008	26
2009	26
2010	23
2011	30
2012	38.81
2013	36.5
2014	31.28

Sources: The sun news, 2011 and Vanguard, 2014

Table 1 above shows the percentages of those who had five credits and above in WAEC including English language and Mathematics from 2006 to 2014, this results indicated that students' performance on the average were below 50% which was not too good. According to[5], 38.81%, 36.57% and 31.28% had six credits including English and Mathematic in WAEC in year 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively in Nigeria. This has been a major concern for government and the society.

It is then obvious from the foregoing that one of the major problems facing the educational system in

Nigeria is the abysmal failure of students in public examinations, particularly at the secondary level of education. According to [49], the high percentage of candidates who failed WASSCE yearly is reflected in the low percentage of the candidates that meets the university admission requirements

Stakeholders have continued to trade blames on the causes of mass failure of students in public examinations. Some people shifted the blame on government, some on parents, some on society and students themselves with the teachers having lion share of the blame. As accusations and counter-accusations on who to blame on the mass failure of students will persist, the fact remains that all the stakeholders have roles to play in solving the problem of abysmal failure of students in public examinations. Nevertheless, there is need to identify the major causes of the problem with a view to providing lasting solutions. It is against this backdrop that this study embarks on a panorama of the perceived causes of mass failure of students in public examinations from different perspectives.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN WEST AFRICAN SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (WASCE) IN NIGERIA

Teachers' factor

According to [17], the most important educational resources is teacher. [1] and [42] opined that a teacher can significantly influence students achievement. [31] said teachers have an important role to play to adequately prepare the young for their roles in the society in order to achieve the set national objectives.

The quality of any educational system depends to a great extent on the quality of teachers in terms of academic and professional qualifications and experience as well as their level of competency in and level of dedication to their primary functions [35]. Teachers are the facilitators who are to impact on students the concepts expected to be learnt [38]. Teachers are the most important factor in the effectiveness of schools and in the quality of a child's education [12].

Nigerian teachers are doing well but there are lots of areas where they need reformation to be able to meet up with the current demand of excellent performance of students in WASCE. Teachers' self-efficacy is an educational construct that both government and researchers in Nigeria are not paying attention to and is a key factor in teacher's effectiveness. What is teacher self-efficacy? Teachers' self-efficacy is the set of beliefs a teacher holds regarding his or her own abilities and competences to teach and influence student behaviour and achievement regardless of outside influences or obstacle

[45]. [39] said teachers with a high level of teacher self-efficacy have been shown to be more resilient in their teaching and likely to persist in difficult time to help all students reach their academic potential.

Students are coming into classes from different background; some are brilliant while some are not. Some can easily take to correction while some are not; even some are already spoiled at home and they are in school. Teacher with high self-efficacy will not regard any student to be unteachable. Teachers with high efficacy perceptions persisted with low-achieving students and used better teaching strategies that allowed such students to learn more effectively. Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy spent more time on non-academic tasks and used less effective teaching strategies that hindered student learning [47].

Many of Nigerian teachers do not preferred poor or average students; they expect all students to always pick at the same time. Those that cannot meet up with their expectation are left behind in the teaching process. Teacher self-efficacy will not enable any teacher see any area in the school curriculum too difficult to approach. We need teacher who knows there is no aspect of his or her work subject too difficult to teach neither is there any student who cannot be taught. Many of the teachers do not cover their syllabus at the right time because they felt there is an area of the subject they are not very good. Teacher who don't trust his or her efficacy will try to avoid dealing with academic problems and instead turn his or her effort inward to relieve his or her emotional distress [16]. Teachers' self-efficacy has been consistently associated with students' academic achievement [22] and [52]. When employee (teacher) has high self-efficacy they are more likely to work harder to learn a new task as they will be more confident in their abilities than employee (teacher) with low self-efficacy [16].

Pedagogical content knowledge

Another educational construct that is very important is Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). PCK is a characteristic of teacher knowledge of how subject matter should be taught [28]. In a related term [41] viewed PCK as a professional knowledge for teachers. PCK embodied a unique form of teacher professional knowledge [28]. PCK is specifically for professional teachers because it guides the teachers' actions when dealing with subject matter in the classroom [51]. It is a special body of knowledge of teacher required to successfully perform teaching within complex and varied context [40]. The importance of PCK in teacher education cannot be overemphasised as [50] said PCK is a knowledge base for teaching. The author further said that PCK is not just the knowledge of subject matter but the understanding of learning difficulties and student conceptions are included.

Many of our teachers have very poor PCK and that is why most student are failing because they don't understand what the teacher are teaching. According to [30], teacher training institutions in Nigeria are guilty of producing teachers that are inadequate in terms of knowledge of subject matter and pedagogical skills. A teacher that lacked adequate knowledge of the subject matter such a teacher can teach nothing but only telling story. Those that have the knowledge of the subject matter cannot impact the knowledge on the students because of poor pedagogy. Unless the teacher is good in PCK he or she will amount to nothing in classroom and students will be failing.

The Finnish educational system should be our model where pre-service teachers are properly trained in both pedagogy and content knowledge.[27]said the general core of Finnish teacher education is represented by pedagogical studies. According to [52],[27], during the university training of Finnish teachers attention is on how to build pedagogical thinking skills to enable teachers manage the teaching process in accordance with contemporary educational knowledge and practice. The moment a teacher cannot impact the knowledge he or she got into student that teacher is not good to teach. [48]said teaching implies the transmission of knowledge from one to another.

Students' factor and parental attitude

According to the Head of National Office, West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the causes of massive failure in WAEC can be attributed to some candidates' lack of knowledge of common pitfalls, coupled with inadequate coverage of the syllabus and non-familiarity with test format. Specifically speaking by the head of WAEC National Office, the major issue is lack of strong reading spirit on candidates who prepare for the exam. Considerable research evidences abound to show that students are responsible for their poor academic performance.

[15],[14] found out that the students' factors of poor academic performance were poor study habits, psychological adjustment problems, lack of interest in school programme, low retention, association with wrong peers, low achievement motivation and emotional problems.[36]and[32] separately expressed worries about the not-too-encouraging attitude of students which has been an impediment to their good academic performance in the country.

Other studies, such as that of[44];[21];[26];[37] and [7] have shown that students' lack of financial support, absenteeism, truancy, use of local language in the classroom, lack of interest and joy in teachers' lessons and learning disability cause poor academic performance of students. Other causes include low cognitive ability, gender prematurity, medical

problems and inability of students to understand examination questions.

Parents play significant roles in the education of their children and wards. Apart from the fact that they pay school fees and other levies, they buy textbooks, uniforms and other materials required by their children and wards. In addition to this, they are expected to supervise their academic works and give them good moral training. They are also expected to visit schools from time to time to find out how their children and wards are behaving with a view to taking corrective measures where and when necessary. However, the failure of parents to play these roles could negatively affect the academic performance of the students[8].

Studies have shown that the poor academic performances of students are caused by the parents. According to[10], polygamous families contributed to poor academic performance of the students. Parents' inability to provide breakfast, textbooks and basic school needs for their children, less interaction with children's teachers and less involvement in the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) resulted in poor academic performance of students[21] also identified insufficient parental income and family type as causes of poor academic performance. Moreover, other causes of mass failure of students in public examinations that could be traced to the parents include lack of proper guidance by parents, failure of parents to provide necessary materials for their children to work with in school and family breakdown[7].

Government factor

Nigeria government has not done well for Nigerian teachers by not paying them well to serve as motivation for them. Unlike in Finland, teachers are well paid and rated very high. Teacher's welfare is very important that teachers in Finland earn very close to the national average salary level, typically equivalent to what mid-career middle-school teachers earn annually in the OECD nations[43]. Because of poor condition of service teachers are no longer committed to their duty. According to[25], the general condition in Nigeria public secondary school is bad and teaching and learning are operating at the lower ebb. These authors concluded that teachers are left with no alternative than to work in a poor condition which have adverse effect on students' academic performance.

There is lack of recognition, motivation in term of salary and other incentive and nobody want to be a teacher; no new qualified teacher want to teach again, the old ones are going away[19]; [23]; [3]; [11]. The resultant effect of this is lack of commitment and ineffectiveness of teachers[11].

Out of field teaching is another serious problem in our educational system in Nigeria which is affecting students' academic performance in secondary schools. Out-of-field teaching is a commonly used term that refers to teachers who are assigned to teach subjects and year levels when they are not suitably qualified to do so [18].

In Nigeria, Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) is stipulated to teach at primary school and lower Junior Secondary School (JSS) but today you find NCE teaching Senior Secondary School (SSS). At another instance a graduate of mathematics is made to teach physics or a graduate of social study is made to teach English language. This is out-of- field teaching and is not helping the system and as long as it continues like this there may not be any improvement in WAEC results. These are teachers assigned to teach subjects for which they have not got adequate training and qualification [24]. [18] defines out-of-field teachers as teacher teaching out of their field of qualification, this field might be a specific subject or year level.

Out-of-field teaching is a problem to our educational system and most of the problem caused by these phenomena is great that we may not be able to quantify. Some of the consequences of out-of-field teaching are, however, probably those not easily quantified [24]. There are many consequences of out-of-field teaching as highlighted by [24]. Some of these consequences as pointed out by the author are:

- Decrease in preparation time for teaching;
- Decrease in time for teaching; and
- Decrease in teacher morale and commitment

The assignment of teachers to teach fields in which they have no training could change the allocation of their preparation time across all of their courses. They may decrease the time supposed to use for other courses in a way to prepare for the one(s) for which they have no background. Out-of-field teacher whose efforts are concentrated on subject content which is new to him, has less time to focus on understanding students' needs and interests [46].

Proficiency in English Language as a factor to academic performance

The essence of language in any human territory cannot be over-emphasized. Language exists since man exists and certainly, it is for the benefit of man [33]. This supports [29] view that language is an indispensable tool for effective communication. Language performs three basic functions of informing, expressing and directing. Again, [20] reiterated that it is regarded as the vehicle of learning and proficiency in the language of instruction (English language) no doubt facilitates learning.

[6] also reiterated their belief in the above assertion about English language. To them, students' language proficiency and competency in English language strongly influenced academic performance in science and technical education. [34] strongly opined that students' proficiency in General English is a virile factor to be considered to outstanding performance(s) in vocational education (Agricultural science education and Economics education). [4] revealed that lack of proficiency in English language is one of the factors contributing to poor performance in Mathematics. In his research, he observed that the performance of students in Mathematics' examination at Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) is poor but further stated that the performance in English is more than that of Mathematics and this he linked to poor reading ability. He then suggests that there is need to improve the teaching of English language to improve students' performance in Mathematics.

To this effect, good language competence in English language may be a positive predictive validity variable on the performance of students on intelligence test. This therefore posted that where the proficiency in English language is low, students' academic performance may also be low. It was on this note that [2] while lamenting on the poor performance of students in West African Examination Council (WAEC) said that the matter is serious because of the influence English has on all the other subjects of the curriculum which invariably pointed at the notion that students' success in English language could influence the overall performance of students in other disciplines.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nevertheless, the problem of poor performance in West African School Certificate Examination in Nigeria has been a concern for parent, government, teachers and researchers alike

Apart from the fact that the mass failure of students in public examinations constitutes wastage on investment in secondary education, it puts a big question mark on the quality of secondary education in the country. Each time the results of students in Senior school Certificate Examination (SSCE) are released, it has been a tale of woes and national embarrassment.

In view of the problems highlighted above the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

- There should be a reformation of teacher training education in Nigeria. This is necessary to ensure priority is given to pedagogy study as it is done in Finland where pedagogy is the core of teacher training.
- There should be conferences, workshops and seminars on teacher self-efficacy where experts will educate and enlighten teachers on the need for

self-efficacy and its importance to teacher effectiveness.

- Government should improve teachers' education by sending teachers to go for short term training in country like Finland where teachers are effectively influencing students' academic achievement positively.
- Government should improve the working conditions of Nigerian teachers and make them comfortable and satisfied with the job.
- Government should include youth in the governance of the nation to serve as motivation for youths in school and thereby know the value of education.
- Parents should let the education of their children be number one in their agenda and be ready to give whatever it will take to give the best for it.
- Parents should continuously monitor their children education by visiting their schools from time to time to know how they performed.

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