

MASS FAILURE OF STUDENTS IN WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS (WASSCE) IN NIGERIA: THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The study investigated the causes of mass failure of students in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) from the perspective of the teachers. It also examined the trend of mass failure of students in the examination between 2003 and 2010. A descriptive research of the survey design was adopted in the study. The sample comprised 200 secondary school teachers selected from ten public secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State using simple random sampling techniques. A self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentage scores. The study revealed a fluctuating trend of mass failure of students in WASSCE between 2003 and 2010 with an average of 78.65% of students without at least five credit passes in English Language and Mathematics. Moreover, from the teachers' perspective the students, teachers, government, parents and schools were responsible for the mass failure of students in WASSCE. It was recommended that the stakeholders should live up to expectation in creating the enabling environment for the students to perform well in WASSCE.*

INTRODUCTION

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 Uduh (2009), the high percentage of candidates who failed WASSCE yearly is reflected in the low percentage of the candidates that meets the university admission requirements. 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. 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.

Various captions in the dailies point towards mass failure of students in the SSCE. Some of these captions include, '79% fail English Language as NECO releases SSCE', 'NECO records mass failure in June/July SSCE', 'Mass failure in both the WASSCE and SSCE', 'Mass failure in public examinations: a national disaster', 'Examination failure: endless shame of a nation'. In the past five years, most of the students who sat for the SSCE each year did not have credit passes in at least five subjects including English Language and Mathematics. The situation is getting worse every year.

The nation was shocked and devastated when the National Examination Council (NECO) released its

November/December 2009 SSCE result showing that only 1.8% passed with five credits and above including English and Mathematics, required for admission into university. The result is one of the most dismal performance in the history of public examinations in Nigeria. Similarly, mass failure of students was recorded in WAEC and NABTEB examinations. The poor results of students in public examinations are true reflections of the deep rot in the nation's educational system.

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 investigated the mass failure of students in public examinations from the perspective of the teachers who appear to have the lion share of the blame.

Literature Review

Examination is described by Fagbamiye (1998) as a tool for measuring and judging the standard of education in any country. Uduh (2009) defined examination as the process of finding out how much of the objectives of specific tasks a learner has

learnt. Examinations could be internally or externally conducted. Internal examinations are usually developed and administered by schools using teacher-made tests. These could be conducted on weekly, termly or end of the school-year. External examinations are developed and administered by public examinations bodies. The public examinations bodies in Nigeria include West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the National Examinations Council (NECO), the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) and the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) among others.

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, government and the society. In other words, the causes of mass failure of students in public examinations are multi-dimensional in nature.

Parents play significant roles in the education of their children and wards. Apart from the fact 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.

Studies have shown that the poor academic performances of students are caused by the parents. According to Ajala & Iyiola (1988), 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 (Etsey, 2005). Akanle (2007) 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 (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010).

The importance of teachers in the educational attainment of the students cannot be overemphasized. The quantity and quality of instructional delivery by the teacher will, to a large extent, determine the academic performance of the students. This perhaps usually prompts some parents to enroll their children in private schools where better academic performance appears to be guaranteed as a result of more supervision and higher quality of instructional

delivery. Therefore, poor academic performance of students is largely blamed on the teachers who are regarded as the custodian of knowledge, skills and values required by the students to excel in various aspects of life.

Various causes of poor academic performance of students which are attributed to the teachers were non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy and lateness to school (Morakinyo, 2003), poor interpersonal relationships (Aremu & Sokan, 2003). Others include absenteeism, inability to complete the syllabi and less interest in children's understanding of lesson (Etsey, 2005) and poor methods of teaching (Asikhia, 2010). Ajayi & Ekundayo (2010) also identified incessant strike, poor methods of teaching, teachers' inability to cover syllabus and teachers' lack of resourcefulness in teaching as causes of mass failure of students in public examinations.

Considerable research evidences abound to show that students are responsible for their poor academic performance. Akinboye (1985), Bakare (1994), Aremu & Sokan (2003) 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. Other studies (Salami, 2004; Etsey, 2005; Karande & Kulkarni, 2005; Ong, Chandram, Lim, Chem & Poh, 2010 and Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010) 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.

The school system has its own share of the blame for poor academic performance of students. According to Kraft (1994) and Etsey (2005), the causes of poor academic performance traceable to the doorsteps of the school were large class size, limited teaching materials, and inadequate textbooks.

Government plays crucial roles in the management of educational system in terms of policy formulation, programmes' implementation, funding, administration, supervision among others. The extent to which government is committed to these roles could make or mar the educational system. It is therefore not out of place to blame government for the mass failure of students in public examinations. Studies have shown that the causes of poor academic performance of students attributed to the government were instability of educational policy, leadership problems, job losses (Bakare, 1994), inadequate poor supervision of instruction (Etsey, Amedahe & Edjah, 2004), inadequate funding of education (Akanle, 2007). Others include irregular payment of teachers' salaries,

inadequate and specialist teachers in school (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010).

The literature so far reviewed has shown that the causes of poor academic performance of students are multi-dimensional in nature. This implies that solutions to the problem require collaborative efforts of the various stakeholders.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to find out the causes of mass failure of students in public examinations as perceived by the teachers. It would also find out the trend of mass failure of the students in public examinations. The study would make recommendations on how to reduce drastically the mass failure of the students based on the findings.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the trend of mass failure of students in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) between 2003 and 2010?

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the trend of mass failure of students in the May/June West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) between 2003 and 2010?

Table 1: Trend of mass failure of students in the May/June West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) between 2003 and 2010

<i>Year</i>	<i>% with at least five credit passes in English Language & Mathematics</i>	<i>% of candidates without at least five credit passes in English Language & Mathematics</i>
2003	19.26	80.74
2004	18.26	81.74
2005	27.53	72.47
2006	15.56	84.44
2007	25.54	74.46
2008	13.76	86.24
2009	25.99	74.01
2010	24.94	75.06
<i>Average %</i>	<i>21.35</i>	<i>78.65</i>

Source: Public Affairs Department of WAEC, Lagos

Table 1 shows a fluctuating trend of mass failure of students in WASSCE between 2003 and 2010 with an average of 78.65% of students without at least five credit passes in English Language and Mathematics. While there was increasing trend of mass failure of students between 2003 and 2004 (80.74% to 81.74%); 2005 and 2006 (72.47% to 84.44%); 2007 and 2008 (74.46% to 86.24%); and 2009 and 2010 (74.01% to 75.06%), there was decreasing trend

2. Who are responsible for the mass failure of students in WASSCE?

METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive survey and ex-post facto designs. Teachers of all the public senior secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State constituted the population. The sample comprised 200 teachers selected from ten secondary schools using simple random sampling technique.

A self-designed instrument titled, ‘Teacher’s Perception of Mass Failure of Students in WASSCE Questionnaire (TPMFSPWQ)’ was used to collect data for the study. The instrument had two sections. *Section A* was on biographical data of the respondents while *Section B* contains 34 items on the various causes of mass failure of the students in WASSCE. The questionnaire was validated by experts in Tests and Measurement. The reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest method and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage scores.

of mass failure of students between 2004 and 2005 (81.74% to 72.47%); 2006 and 2007 (84.44% to 74.46%), and 2008 and 2009 (86.24% to 74.01%).

Research Question 2: Who are responsible for the mass failure of students in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)?

In order to answer this question, the frequency and percentage scores of the responses on the 34 items in section B of the questionnaire were computed. The average scores under each of the categories of people responsible for the mass failure were calculated. These are shown in table 2 as follows:

Table 2: People responsible for the mass failure of students in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)

S/N	Item	Frequency		Percentage	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1.	Students	95	25	79	21
2.	Teachers	65	55	54.5	45.5
3.	Government	67	53	56	44
4.	Parents	90	30	75	25
5.	Schools	77	43	64	36

Table 2 shows that 79% of the teachers agreed that the students were responsible for their mass failure in WASSCE. The major reasons agreed upon by the teachers were poor study habit (97.5%); inadequate preparation for examination (93%); watching too many home videos (92.5%); poor learning ability of students (92%); and irregular attendance of classes by students (86%). Others include students' inclination to cheat in examination (85%); emotional problems (76%); and inability of students to understand examination questions.

As shown in table 2, only 54.5% of the respondents agreed that teachers were responsible for the mass failure of students in WASSCE. The major reasons agreed upon were poor methods of teaching (69%); teachers' lack of resourcefulness in teaching (63%) and lack of motivation (57.5%).

According to table 2, 56% of the respondents agreed that government can be blamed for the mass failure of students in WASSCE. The major contributions of the government to mass failure of students as perceived by the respondents were poor facilities in schools (72.5%) and poor funding of schools (61%).

Table 2 shows that 75% of the respondents agreed that parents can be blamed for the mass failure of students in WASSCE. The perceived reasons for this include failure of parents to provide necessary materials (87%); family breakdown (82.5%); inadequate parental supervision (81%); parents' use of children for economic activities (80%); and poor moral training (79%).

As shown in table 2, 64% of the respondents agreed that schools contributed to mass failure of students in WASSCE. The perceived reasons include inadequate laboratory facilities (73%); inadequate library facilities (69%); inadequate teaching materials (67%); and large class size (62%).

Discussion

The study revealed a fluctuating trend of mass failure of students in WASSCE between 2003 and 2010 with an average of 78.65% of students without at least five credit passes in English Language and Mathematics. This implies that most of the students who wrote the examinations were unable to meet the minimum entry requirements for admission in the university. This is a reflection of the poor quality of education at the secondary school level. The abysmal failure of students in WASSCE could be as a result of negligent of duties among the various stakeholders in secondary education in the country. The finding is in line with Uduh (2009).

It was also found that those responsible for the mass failure of students in WASSCE as perceived by the teachers were the students, teachers, government, parents and schools. This shows that the teachers did

not shy away from the fact that they were also partly responsible for the problem. It also reflects the multi-dimensional nature of the causes of mass failure of students in public examinations. It must be emphasised that the students, teachers, government, parents and schools have crucial roles to play in the performance of students in WASSCE. Where they play their roles as expected, there is assurance for good performance of students in the examination, but if they are found deficient in their roles, there is high tendency for students to perform poorly in the examination. The finding corroborates that of Kraf (1994), Morakinyo (2003), Etsey (2005), Akanle and Ajayi & Ekundayo (2010).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Students' performance in WASSCE has been persistently poor. While the teachers felt they were

partly responsible for the poor performance they strongly believed that the students, government, parents and schools could not be exonerated from the problem. In view of the multi-dimensional nature of the causes of mass failure of students in WASSCE, there is need for multi-dimensional solutions to the problem. To this end, the teachers, parents, schools and government should live up to expectation in creating the enabling environment for the students to perform well in the WASSCE. Moreover, the students should study hard to come out in flying colours in the WASSCE.

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