

STUDENTS' LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS FOR 'WASSCE' ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXAMINATION: AN EVALUATION OF STUDENTS ON EXCHANGE PROGRAMME IN ZAMFARA STATE UNITY SCHOOLS

Abubakar Abdullahi
Ministry of Education, Zamfara State
abubakargumi2@gmail.com
Anas Sani Anka
Federal University Gusau

ABSTRACT

Student Exchange Programme (SEP) is a symbiotic relationship between states in the North based on education programme at the level of secondary school education introduced to provide quality education and promote socio-cultural integration for the unity and educational advancement of the North. This mission is defiled and threatened by students' poor academic performance in SSCE in so much that SS III students from unity schools can no longer perform creditably in their SSCE for they are underprepared. The paper identified the level of preparedness of SEP students on English language examination as the major objective of the study. From the population of 648 SS III students, the paper applied quantitative survey method using 200 students from Government Unity Secondary Schools Gummi and Kwatarkwashi in Zamfara State. It is found that the students were not prepared for and were incapable of writing and passing WASSCE creditably. This is gathered from the results using a PRE-WAEC-TEST. The finding affirmed that out of 200 candidates only 16 scored at credit level while 184 students woefully failed in English language paper. The paper recommended that English language teachers should emphasize the SS III students' receptive and productive skills; while SS III students should also be provided with the English language textbooks as that will speed up their study habit and alleviate their poor reading culture.

Keywords: Students, Preparedness, WASSCE, English language paper, Unity schools.

INTRODUCTION

The English language is arguably the most significant and most controversial subject taught in Nigerian schools. It is a medium of instruction, the official language in Nigeria and compulsory subject that must be passed at all levels of education, Danladi (2008). Anizoba (2001) argued that majority of Nigerian students are not able to achieve the standard level of English proficiency which affects their overall educational performance. This paper is to examine students' level of preparedness in WAEC examination most particularly Students on Exchange Programme (SEP) who travel across sections of the Nineteen (19) Northern states of Nigeria for exchange study mission.

Notwithstanding, the paper argued that English language teaching force in unity schools is not commensurate with the students' writing and speaking skills and the paradox of WAEC

yearly results successes, yet circumstantial evidence established that the secondary level students lack self-confidence in their English language delivery. Hence, candidates write incomprehensibly and perform poorly in English language examination. In other words, it is discernible that students underperform in English language practice but examining bodies such as WAEC, NECO attests to the students' hard-work and commitment. This remains the point of argument that the paper is set to address.

The study is keen to investigate whether the assertions made by Benson (2005:4) quoted in Ibrahim (2006:2) that “an area of educational calamity observed in the secondary schools is the inability of the SS II and SS III students to read fluently and write letters of application.” And the recent survey conducted by High-Level Women Advocates (HILWA) that “More than 50% of the pupils that completed primary school education in Zamfara state cannot read a complete English sentence”.

Although the situation has shown that this phenomenon is prevalent even on NYSC camps and at places of primary assignment where corps members (who are certified graduates of first Degrees/HNDs) have to be helped with draft and samples of application letters. It is feared that they lack a flair for language skills to write. But this study is meant to examine the students' academic competence.

It is against this backdrop that, this study is apt to investigate the following research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the level of preparedness of Students on Exchange Programme (SEP) on English language WASSCE?
2. What are the real factors responsible for their performance in the PRE-WAEC test?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The May/June WAEC 2016 results breakdown/statistics by order of the Thirty Six (36) States' performance and FCT Abuja ranked Abia state at the first position, placing the entire Southern states at **First top ten (10) position**, thus: Anambra 2nd, Edo 3rd, Rivers 4th, Imo 5th, Lagos 6th, Bayelsa 7th, Delta 8th, Enugu 9th and Ebonyi 10th respectively.

This index however, graded Five (5) other Southern states, and Four states from the North emerging in the **Second ten (10) position**, thus: Ekiti 11th, Kaduna 12th, Ondo 13th, Abuja 14th, Kogi 15th, Benue 16th, Akwa/Ibom, Kwara 18th, Ogun 19th, and Cross Rivers as 20th positions respectively. Unfortunately, WAEC declared that the entire North-East, North-West, except Kaduna, and the entirety of North-Central states (excluding Kogi, Benue, and Kwara) emerged at the last positions. These states by order of their positions emerged are: Taraba 21st, Plateau 22nd, Nasarawa 23rd, Kano 24th, Borno 25th, Oyo 26th, Niger 27th, Adamawa 28th, Osun 29th, Sokoto 30st, Bauchi 31nd, Kebbi 32rd, Katsina 33rd, Gombe 34th, Jigawa 35th, Zamfara 36th and Yobe last positions respectively.

Although, the result as it is, is the best in the last ten years, but Dayo Adesulu in Vanguard, August 11th, (2016:38) casts doubts over the above results by WAEC arguing that the results recording 53% five credits pass in English language and Mathematics were due to WAEC lowering standard of questions set and the marking scheme, not on ground of merit.

Overview of the Genesis of Student Exchange Programme (SEP)

SEP is a state government educational project designed by Northern state governors for students of the identified participating states to travel to the length and breadth of Northern Nigeria in search for quality education in various Unity Colleges. This is recognized in the National Policy on Education (NPE), 3rd Edition (1998), Section 4, sub-section 28 (a) and (c) emphasizing that; *“inter-state exchange (programme) visits of students SHALL be encouraged”*.

The programme emanated at a time the states which now participate in the SEP were under the control of the Northern Regional Government until they were eventually carved out as an individual state at different periods in the national history. Under the Northern Region was easy to move students from one province to other for education purposes. As Yakzum, (2013:3) further observed, Plateau students traveled to Ilorin, Toro, Bauchi, Kano and Katsina, Maiduguri and Zaria. From other provinces, students came to the Benue-Plateau to attend GC Keffi, GC Makurdi, GHS Gindiri, GSS Kuru, Government Craft School Pankshin, BSS Gindiri, TC Bukuru.

The SEP programme had the added advantage of quality education and promoting cultural integration among students of the member states. According to Yakzum, (2013) those who initiated the programme had the zeal for the unity and educational advancement of the North and Nigeria as a whole. They foresaw that with the creation of more states the bond of unity existing among the Northern states would grow cold hence the need to put in place what would forge unity among the states. In his assessment of the SEP, Yakzum was precise to say that those who initiated the SEP programme understood its mission and vision and to some extent pursued it faithfully and did not allow its challenges to disrupt its smooth operation. (p. 3). He, however, lamented that when the succeeding generation of leaders and educational administrators arrived, the situation changed.

Challenges of SEP Students in English Language Paper

Anizoba (2001) and Igbokwe (2007) lamented that students are no longer able to communicate in English and that many of them cannot compose essays nor are they able to write any letter. Moreover, Igbokwe and Asogwa (2010) state that English Language study in Nigeria has been on the decline for more than a decade.

However, in her empirical analysis, Ibrahim (2006:3-6) identified Six (6) among other causal factors believed to be responsible for threatening students' success in English language proficiency.

- (i) Lack of appropriate textbooks in the hands of students.
- (ii) SEP teachers of English language are rarely retrained in their teaching job

- (iii) Unsatisfactory coverage of English Language syllabus
- (iv) Examination malpractice and emphasis on paper qualification.
- (v) Lack of extracurricular activities and high population of students per class.
- (vi) The scarcity of students' zeal, anxious, curiosity and inquisitive to learn.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The study adopted quantitative survey method of research. The survey of Two Hundred Students 200 students from Government Unity Secondary Schools, Gummi and Kwatarkwashi both male and female students of SS III class. However, the sample size of 200 was derived from One Hundred (100) students selected from each of the two SEP Schools in Zamfara, thus based on the selection of first and last Thirty (30) names of students from the class attendance register for Six (6) classes, Three (3) from each school with the addition of 20 other students randomly selected. This makes a total of Two Hundred (200) candidates for this study out of Six Hundred and Forty-Eight (648) SS III students as the population of the study. However, purposive sampling method was used for selecting Zamfara State SEP schools. The selection of Zamfara State Unity Colleges for the study is owing to the fact that Northern states constitute the largest region in the country. In a nut shell, the data were generated from Three (3) instruments thus:

- i. Examination booklets
- ii. WAEC question papers for 2016 were used for examining and grading Two Hundred (200) students from SS III and their performance index to determine the level of their preparedness in the **pre-was-test** administered.
- iii. WAEC 2016 marking scheme for English language paper in order to gather accurate and reliable information from the examinees.

RESULTS

The article aimed at presenting, analyzing and interpreting the data gathered for the study. It contains charts and tables with the use of frequencies and percentage scores showing the results on the "*Press Coverage of Northern States' Unity Colleges; Students' Level of Preparedness for WASSCE on English Language Examination: An Analysis of Zamfara State Unity Schools*".

In carrying out the study, Four hundred and Eighty (480) newspapers were content-analyzed to ascertain the magnitude of the coverage SEP received from the Nigerian press. However, Two Hundred 200 SEP students were examined to determine whether they can or cannot write WASSCE by themselves on the English language conducted by WAEC.

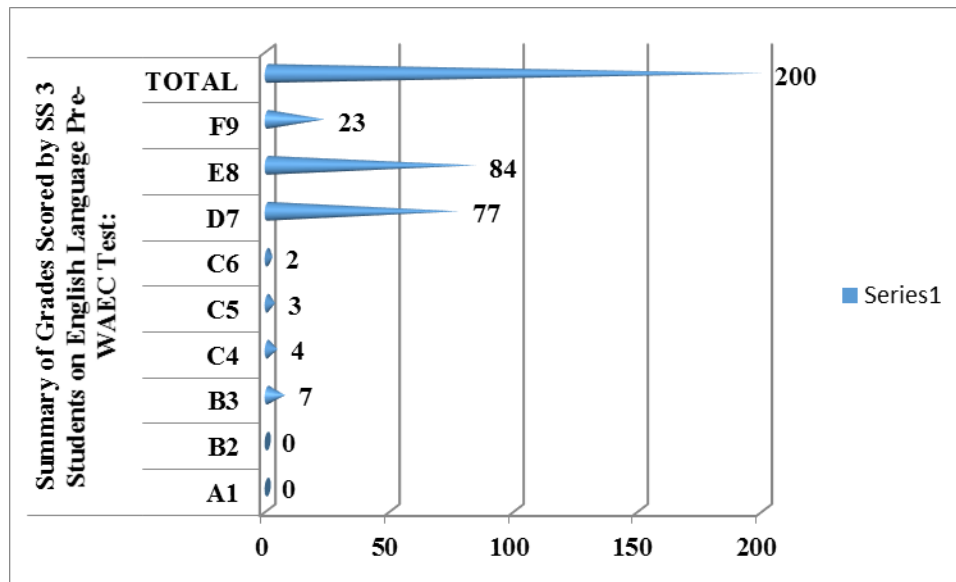


Figure 1: Summary of Grades Scored by SS 3 Students on English Language Pre-WAEC Test:

A1	B2	B3	%	C4	%	C5	%	C6	%	D7	%	E8	%	F9	%	TOTAL
0	0	7	3.5%	4	2%	3	1.5%	2	1%	77	38.5%	84	42%	23	11.5%	200

Source: Field survey, January 2017

The results in *figure 1* above represent SS III SEP students’ academic performance showing their level of preparedness to write the upcoming SSCE (WAEC). From the result, it is indicated that only Sixteen (16) students who scored at credit level are prepared to write and pass their WASSCE on English language paper as represented in 3.5%; 2%; 1.5% and 1%. This is as against a total of One Hundred and Eighty-Four (184) students who are underprepared for their SSCE represented in the data, thus, 38.5%; 42% and 11.5% hence they performed very poor.

Given the above, it can be observed from the sample on table 1 reviewed below, that SS III students’ failure in English language examination have been on the up and on. The reason is simply that students are not adequately made prepared by their teachers to enable them to perform creditably and duly write and pass their SSCE.



Table 1: NECO Summary of Grades on English Language, 2009, 2010, 2011 & 2012

YEAR	No. SAT	GRADES	ENGLISH LANG.
2009	402	CREDITS PASS FAIL No. of Cand. Sat	6 131 262 401
2010	441	CREDITS PASS FAIL No. of Cand. Sat	1 45 378 441
2011	419	CREDITS PASS FAIL No. of Cand. Sat	1 289 125 419
2012	351	CREDITS PASS FAIL No. of Cand. Sat	56 253 0 351

In retrospect, however, the *table 1* above illustrated that SEP students have many years of poor performance as shown on the results of English language examination not only in WAEC but also in NECO. From the data it was indicated that only Six (6) candidates out of Four Hundred and One (401) in 2009; One (1) candidate out of Four Hundred and Forty One (441) in 2010; also One (1) candidate out of Four Hundred and Nineteen (419) in 2011 and Fifty Six (56) candidates out of Three Hundred and Fifty One (351) in 2012 scored credit in English language. All the rest failed to meet the standard. This depicts that English language teachers of the SEP schools need to be critically re-examined to troubleshoot their professional competency in the subject area over the serial failure of SEP students on the English language.

Relating Findings to the Research Questions

To answer the question of “*What is the level of preparedness of Students on Exchange Programme (SEP) on English language PRE-WASCE test?*”? The results in figure 1 elucidated that SS III students are ill-prepared to write SSCE (WAEC) as it indicated that One Hundred and Eighty-Four (184) students failed to obtain credit in English language PRE-WAEC examination. This comes in term with the Anizoba (2001), and Igbokwe’s (2007) views that students are no longer able to communicate in English and that many of them cannot compose essays nor are they able to write any letter.

The finding, however, is in agreement with the Luoch (2014) who cited Hoyt & Sorensen (1999) that preponderant numbers of senior secondary school leavers neither understand nor undertake the right preparation for colleges and universities at their "o" level ground. (p. 1179). He established that a student's secondary school preparation is predictive of the need they will have for remedial education in college or university. Most of the factors associated with the students' failure in English language teaching, learning and examination included unsatisfactory

coverage of the syllabus, (un)qualified teachers who lack interest in a teaching job, disconnection of students' interest to English language learning.

CONCLUSION

The paper draws the following conclusion:

1. SEP students are too deformed to excel or perform creditably in the English language.
2. English language teaching force in secondary schools is threatened by lacking training/retraining of teachers.
3. Students themselves are neither anxious nor zealous to appreciate the subject as part of supposed effort for self-learning style.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the final note, the study made the following recommendations for the effective management and education quality control of the unity schools in the 19 Northern states of the Federation:

1. English language teachers from unity schools should be given adequate and regular training to ensuring effective language teaching delivery and sufficient coverage of the syllabus.
2. English language teachers should prepare SS III students on developing receptive and productive skills; state government should provide for each senior student with the English language textbooks in their possession (for take-home) to speed up their summary writing skills, comprehension, and composition. This will alleviate their poor reading culture.
3. Unity schools principals should duly mandate school academic staff to use the English language as the only medium of communication in school.
4. The principal in collaboration with class and house masters should engage senior students to the constant use of English language, and students' use of vernacular in class or dormitory should be forbidden. Such as student lodging complaint should be encouraged to speak in English.
5. English language teachers in secondary schools should be properly prioritized and better motivated to enable them to engage students in constant language practice.

REFERENCE

- Anizoba, E.N. (2001). *Effects of the writing process method on students' performance in English composition*. Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, University of Nigeria Nsukka.
- Danladi, S. S. (2008). "Language Policy: Nigeria and the role of English language in the 21st Century". *European Scientific Journal*. 9 (17) pp. 1-21.
- Dayo, A. (August 11th, 2016:38). WAEC Results Assessment. *Vanguard newspaper*. Ibrahim, H. A. (2006). Factors responsible for students' poor performance in English. *A Paper presented at one workshop organized by English Language Teachers' Association, Zamfara State for senior secondary school teachers*.
- Igbokwe, U. C. & Asogwa, U. (2010). English language teachers' self-efficacy in The use of Computers. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 17(2), 137- 148.



- Igbokwe, U. L. (2009). *Effects of CALLA on students' achievement in essay writing*. An unpublished Ph.D. Thesis University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Luoch, T. O. (2014). The impact of remedial English on the improvement of English proficiency: The case of the United States international university-Africa. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 152 (2014) 1178 – 1188 Available online at www.sciencedirect.com Science Direct ERPA 2014.
- National Policy on Education (NPE), 3rd Edition (1998), Section 4, Sub-Section 28 (a) and (c). NECO Summary of Statistics of Grades on English Language, 2009, 2010, 2011 & 2012 for Government Unity Secondary School, Gummi, Zamfara State.
- Yakzum, G. G. (2013). *The Challenges of achieving peace in the success of student exchange programme*. Paper presented at the 2013 Student Exchange Programme Conference and Workshop of Principals, Monitoring Inspectors and Schedule Officers; at ST Louis' College, Plateau state, on the 29th August 2013.
- WAEC, (2016). West African senior school certificate examination for school candidates: English language 3, 2 and 1. *West African Examinations Council, (WAEC) SC 2016*.

