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Comparative Analysis of WAEC and NECO SSCE English Language Results in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: This study compared students' results in WAEC (West African Examinations Council) and NECO (National Examinations Council) SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) English Language examinations in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was limited to public senior secondary school students' SSCE (WAEC and NECO) English Language results in Ilorin, Kwara State, for the period of two years. A total of 600 students' results were selected for this study from five Local Government Areas using multi-stage sampling techniques. Ex post facto research design was adopted for this study; and the instrument for this study was a proforma titled "Students' Achievement in English Language Inventory". Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages were employed to provide answers to the research questions raised, while Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient was used to test the hypotheses formulated at 0.05 significant level. Findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents sampled passed English Language in WAEC at credit level for the year 2018 and 2019, while the performance of students in NECO is positively related and comparable in English Language. It was, therefore, recommended among others that the examining bodies should also continue to meet the standards of test construction procedures. They should ensure that experts are engaged in their activities, especially in test construction and administration. They should always strike balance by giving out items that are fair to all candidates, so that they will not see their questions as inferior to other examining bodies.

KEY WORDS: SSCE; WAEC; NECO; English Language; Results.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the veritable instruments for social and political mobilization and the acquisition of important technical skills. For these

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reasons, a substantial share of the nation's resources is invested in education. The performance of candidates on their graduating examinations after these investments has long been a matter of concern to many well-meaning individuals, institutions, government, and other stakeholders in education. Likewise, the public disparages the falling standard of education as evidenced by the lack of inadequate skills and personal integrity of many school leavers (Ololube, 2008, 2011a and 2011b; Kpolovie, Ololube & Ekwebelem, 2011; and Jwasshaka, Amin & Latif, 2021).

However, the broad aims of secondary school education in Nigeria, as stated in the National Policy of Education, are to prepare the individual child for: (1) useful living in the society; and (2) for higher education. In reality, these aims are very often defeated as most secondary school graduates fail to adapt adequately to society and fail to succeed in post-secondary education despite their possession of excellent or good certificates. The need to quantify behaviour cultivated in learners has placed evaluation at an indispensable position in the teaching/learning process in schools. Evaluation is concerned with determining the extent to which educational objectives and the desired behavioural changes in the learners have been attained as well as making value judgments on the worth of the attributes (Okoroma, 2006; FME, 2013; and Matthew, 2013).

In effect, the following are involved for the purposes of evaluation at secondary school level. *First*, internal evaluation in the form of continuous assessment, project, assignment, and so on. *Second*, external evaluation organized by the WAEC (West African Examinations Council) and NECO (National Examinations Council), NABTEB (National Business and Technical Examination Board), and so on (Olufemi, 2013; Onyibe, Uma & Ibina, 2015; and Onihunwa *et al.*, 2018).

Some of these examination bodies in Nigeria include the WAEC, NECO, NABTEB, and JAMB (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board). A closer look at the operations of these boards reveals that some of them perform similar functions. WAEC and NECO, for instance, all conduct secondary school graduate certification, although in the case of NABTEB, the examination is reserved for graduates of Nigerian Technical and Vocational Colleges.

The assemblage of subject examinations conducted by these examining bodies is known as the SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) and serves as an end-of-course evaluation for all secondary school graduates. The purpose of this examination is to ascertain to what degree students in a particular course have achieved the course or educational objectives (Offor, 2001; Zubayr & Ibrahim, 2016; and Ifeoma, Ebio & Jacob, 2021).

The establishment of NECO, which was seen by many as an attempt to reduce the burden on WAEC and mitigate the burden of testing large number of candidates, unfortunately led to concerns by some that credibility issues would inevitably arise. With two examining bodies, WAEC and NECO, conducting parallel SSCEs, students admitted to write either version of the SSCE should be assumed to possess similar academic strengths, those needed for undergraduate activities (Afemikhe, 2002; Kpolovie, Ololube & Ekwebelem, 2011; and Fasoyiro, 2018).

In the recent past, however, some calls have been made for the cancellation or scrapping of NECO for fear that the SSCE, it administers is not as valid as that of the WAEC. Critics submit that a large portion (40%) of candidates' final outcome in each of the subject areas at the NECO Senior School Certificate Examination is made up of school-based teacher assessment scores (Ejinkeonye, 2004; and Falaye & Afolabi, 2005). This assertion (even if true) may not necessarily be a minus or detrimental to the credibility of NECO certification as the National Policy on Education has been quoted by S.O. Bamidele & A.E. Adewale (2013) as stating that:

[...] educational assessment and evaluation is to be liberalized by basing such evaluation in whole or part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual (Bamidele & Adewale, 2013).

The implication of such action is that the Council is complying with Policy of Education guideline on assessment at the secondary school level. The credibility of SSCEs (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations) and their certificates was also brought under serious attack at the foreign scene as some countries overseas doubted the validity of the certificates. This immediately resonated in the domestic scene, where institutions of higher learning and employers of labour started becoming skeptical about SSCE results. The situation seems to be deteriorating by the day.

M.O. Philips (2011), and other scholars, have blamed teachers, students, and the examining bodies for it. The examining bodies and school authorities are not doing enough as they do plug loopholes and the attitude of students who perceive NECO (National Examinations Council) SSCE as inferior has also worsened the situation. They joined some members of the public, including some private agencies, employees of labour, government of some states of the Federation, and institutions of higher learning to discriminate against NECO SSCE results. This unfavourable development is badly affecting the nation's educational system and economy (Ojo, 2006; Philips, 2011; Ajetunmobi, 2012; and Upahi, Issa & Oyelekan, 2015).

Despite the fact that the certificates being awarded by these three examining bodies are said to be comparable, yet, stakeholders in the education sector doubt their equivalence. If WAEC (West African Examinations Council) and NECO are able to maintain high standards in the development and administration of Senior School Certificate Examinations, then performances in the examination should be good indicators of individuals' standings with respect to any of the tested subject areas.

How often, however, is this the case? It is possible, for instance, to identify candidates who scored an F9 on the WAEC SSCE and an A1 on the NECO SSCE in the same subject and in the same year, thus leaving observers to wonder if the three SSCEs are in fact parallel?

The researchers, therefore, intended to approach the issue of the equivalence of certificates being awarded by WAEC and NECO in terms of the validity of the examinations used for the award of these certificates. The study was hunched that public awareness of the comparability of the three examinations' results will point at the direction of hope to the citizens and restore public confidence in this all important examinations.

Statement of the Problem. The introduction of local examining body, NECO (National Examinations Council) to compete with WAEC (West African Examinations Council) that had enjoyed the monopoly of place in the conduct of SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) for almost 50 years has had an unsettling effect on the nation's educational system. This act jolted WAEC out of complacency for a robust sensitization of the public on its mandate and has kept it on toes in order to remain in business. On the other hand, NECO in order to stay afloat and gain root in the presence of a more experienced and "almighty WAEC" has resorted to aggressive propaganda to establish the genuineness of their emergence (Kpolovie, Ololube & Ekwebelem, 2011; Upahi, Issa & Oyelekan, 2015; and Egwa, 2016).

These acts have left the public confused about the credibility and comparability of their examinations, especially as the examinations are not getting any better. The holders of the certificates are also not bearing witness to the claims and efforts of the examining bodies. Worse still is the mass irregularities that often mar the conduct of these examinations (Uwadiae & Adelukun, 2011).

However, the researchers believed that the noble objectives of secondary education can only be achieved if there is an effective evaluation and assessment machinery. Also, one way of investigating the validity of public doubt about the comparability of SSCE results is to determine the success of WAEC and NECO in maintaining the once high standards of

the Senior School Certificate Examination.

These standards can be assessed using one or more of the following criteria: (1) coverage of course content; (2) coverage of educational objectives; (3) performance of candidates in the examination; (4) the examination as a good predictor of future performance; and (5) the reliability of the test (Kpolovie, Ololube & Ekwebelem, 2011).

The present study focuses on the performance of candidates in the examination. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the comparative analysis of WAEC and NECO Senior School Certificate Examinations English Language results in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of this study: “What is the profile of students’ performance in SSCE (WAEC and NECO) English Language results from 2018 to 2019?”.

Research Hypotheses. The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

Ho₁. There is no significant relationship between students’ performance in WAEC and NECO SSCE results in English Language (2018).

Ho₂. There is no significant relationship between students’ performance in WAEC and NECO SSCE results in English Language (2019).

METHOD

This study was limited to public senior secondary school students’ SSCE [Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination] (WAEC [West African Examinations Council] and NECO [National Examinations Council]) English Language results in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, for the period of two years. A total of 600 students’ results were selected for this study from five Local Government Areas using multi-stage sampling technique.

Ex post facto research design was adopted for this study and the instrument for this study was a proforma titled “Students’ Achievement in English Language Inventory”. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages were employed to provide answers to the research questions raised, while Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient was used to test the hypotheses formulated at 0.05 significant level.

Data Analysis Techniques. The demographic profile above shows that 258 (43.0%) of the respondents were female and 342 (57.0%) were male respondents. Research Question One: *What is the profile of students’ performance in SSCE (WAEC and NECO) English Language results from 2018 to 2019?* See table 1.

Table 1 shows the frequency counts and percentages of students’ academic performance in English Language for the year 2018 and 2019

Table 1:
Frequency Counts and Percentages of Students' Performance in English Language
in WAEC and NECO

Year	Grades	WAEC			
		Distinction (A ₁)	Credits (B ₂ - C ₆)	Pass (D ₇ - E ₈)	Fail (F ₉)
2018	Freq. (%)	47 (7.8%)	369 (61.5%)	98 (16.3%)	86 (14.3%)
2019	Freq. (%)	51 (8.5%)	345 (57.5%)	103 (17.2%)	101 (16.8%)
NECO					
2018	Freq. (%)	72 (12.0%)	401 (66.8%)	57 (9.5%)	70 (11.7%)
2019	Freq. (%)	70 (11.7%)	414 (69.0%)	53 (8.8%)	63 (10.5%)

May/June WAEC (West African Examinations Council), NECO (National Examinations Council) across the selected schools. A total of 47 (7.8%) and 51 (8.5) respondents had distinction in WAEC English Language for the year 2019 and 2016 respectively. Also, 369 (61.5%) and 345 (57.5) of the selected students passed at credit level in WAEC English Language for the year 2018 and 2019 respectively. Around 98 (16.3%) and 103 (17.2%) of the respondents had pass grade, while 70 (11.7%) and 63 (10.5%) of the students failed English Language for the year 2018 and 2019 respectively. This means that the majority of the respondents sampled passed WAEC English Language passed at credit level for the year 2018 and 2019.

The results of NECO showed an improvement in the performance of students in English Language as 72 (12.0%) and 70 (11.7%) of the respondents had distinctions in the 2014 and 2015 respectively. Also, 401 (66.8%) and 414 (69.0%) students had credit grades for the year 2018 and 2015 respectively. While 57 (9.5%) and 53 (8.8%) of the sampled respondents had pass grades, 70 (11.7%) and 63 (10.5%) of them failed English Language for the year 2018 and 2015 respectively. This implies that NECO recorded better results in English Language for the year 2018 and 2015 as most of the students passed at credit level.

Hypotheses Testing. The hypotheses generated in this study were analyzed using inferential statistics of Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: *There is no significant relationship between students' performance in WAEC and NECO SSCE results in English Language (2018).*

Table 2 shows the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient analysis comparing performance of students in English Language for the year 2018 May/June WAEC and NECO.

The result in the table 2 shows that the calculated significance values of 0.000 is less than the chosen 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between students' performance in WAEC (West African Examinations Council)

Table 2:
Summary of Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient between Students' Performance in WAEC and NECO English Language (2018)

Year	Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	ρ	Sig.
2018	WAEC	600	30.49	5.90	598	0.394	0.000
	NECO	600	36.76	3.78			

*Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 3:
Summary of Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient between Students' Performance in WAEC and NECO English Language (2019)

Year	Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	ρ	Sig.
2019	WAEC	600	30.28	4.74	598	0.671	0.000
	NEABTEB	600	40.25	4.35			

*Significant at $P < 0.05$

and NECO (National Examinations Council) SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) results in English Language for the year 2018. This implies that the performance of students in WAEC and NECO is positively related and comparable in English Language.

H_{02} : *There is no significant relationship between students' performance in WAEC and NECO SSCE results in English Language (2019).*

Table 3 shows the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient analysis comparing performance of students in English Language for the year 2019 May/June WAEC and NECO.

The result in table 3 shows that the calculated significance values of 0.000 is less than the chosen 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between students' performance in WAEC (West African Examinations Council) and NECO (National Examinations Council) SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) results in English Language for the year 2019. This means that the performance of students in WAEC is positively related to that of NECO in English Language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents sampled had credit grades, i.e. B_2 to C_6 , in SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) English Language (WAEC [West African Examinations Council] and NECO [National Examinations Council]) for the year 2018 and 2015 respectively. It was also revealed that NECO recorded higher number of distinctions and lower number of F_9 for the

years under consideration. This means the respondents did better in NECO for the year 2018 and 2019 SSCE English Language.

This finding is not in line with the assertions of B.A. Falaye & E.R.I. Afolabi (2005); C.C. Abanobi *et al.* (2014); and other scholars, who observed that NECO is not valid like other examination and, thus, not comparable with WAEC. One of the likely reasons for this is NECO and NABTEB (National Business and Technical Examination Board) are examining bodies that assumed to be valid and reliable, because they adhered to the uniform procedures of test construction and standardization. Thus, differences in performance should be exclusively the result of chance factors like the academic dedication of candidates and not necessarily because the examination is not valid (*cf* Falaye & Afolabi, 2005; Bandele & Adewale, 2013; and Abanobi *et al.*, 2014).

Another likely reason for this result may be because NECO and NABTEB usually come after WAEC, when the candidates may seem to have overcome exam tension, discovered their weaknesses, mastered exam rudiments, learnt how to manage exam time better and well prepared or organized. These examinations (NECO and NABTEB) usually provide a second chance for the students to re-strategize better ways of doing things.

The outcome of hypothesis one showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between students' performance in WAEC and NECO SSCE results in English Language for the year 2018. This implies that the performance of students in WAEC and NECO is comparable in English Language and the examinations are said to be equivalence.

This outcome supports that of P.J. Kpolovie, N.P. Ololube & A.B.I. Ekwebelem (2011), and other scholars, who found a significant positive relationship between candidates' performance in WAEC and NECO SSCEs in all subjects. This finding may be due to the fact that WAEC and NECO are examining bodies that perform similar functions. They are both giving the mandate of providing uniform standards to all test takers in SSCE as an end-of-course evaluation for all secondary school graduates (Kpolovie, Ololube & Ekwebelem, 2011; Ajao & Awogbemi, 2012; and Gogo, Ojimba & Nathaniel, 2020).

The result of hypothesis two revealed a positive and significant relationship between students' performance in WAEC and NECO SSCE results in English Language for the year 2019. This means that the performance of students in WAEC is related to that of NECO in English Language.

This result lends credence to that of S.O. Bamidele & A.E. Adewale (2013), and other scholars, whose findings showed that WAEC, NECO, and NABTEB mathematics achievement examinations are highly reliable and valid. The likely reason for this result may be that performance of

candidates in the examination is one of the yardsticks of standards of SSCE. Since the performance of students in WAEC and NECO is positively related, they are said to be standard exams and, thus parallel and comparable. Another likely reason for this outcome may be because NECO is an alternative examining body who may need to justify the purpose of its establishment. Since NECO can be used to seek employment or admission for further studies like WAEC, it means they are comparable (Bamidele & Adewale, 2013; Bandele & Adewale, 2013; and Moyinoluwa, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the majority of the senior secondary school students in the sampled schools had credit grades, i.e. B₂ to C₆, in English Language for the year 2018 and 2019 May/June WAEC (West African Examinations Council) and NECO (National Examinations Council).

It was also shown that students had more credits in NECO than WAEC in the sampled schools; it could also be concluded that there was a significant relationship between students' performance in English Language in SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) WAEC and NECO for the year 2018 and 2019 respectively.

About the recommendations, in view of the findings of this study, the examining bodies should also continue to meet the standards of test construction procedures. They should ensure that experts are engaged in their activities especially in test construction and administration. They should always strike balance by giving out items that are fair to all candidates so that they will not see their questions as inferior to other examining bodies.

Government should formulate educational policy that will mandate all tertiary institutions (home and abroad) to take the certificate awarded by any of these examining bodies for admission. Since the results of these examinations are parallel and equivalent, candidates who hold NECO certificate should not be denied admission for further studies.

Institutions of higher learning should be admitting holders of certificates of NECO for courses of their choice provided they meet up with the admission requirements. This will help to dispel public opinions about the credibility, validity and comparability of these examinations. Further discrimination against holders of any of this certificate may discourage parents and other stakeholders from enrolling their wards for it, and possibly for employment purposes.

Students should be re-oriented about the purpose of an exam. They should be encouraged to be serious in all examinations. They should

not see one exam as being important than the other. Parents and schools should also help them by de-emphasizing the importance of one exam to their future career so that they will be able to take all exams seriously.

Teachers should be using the past questions of NECO to prepare their candidates for any exam. They should test their students using questions from other examining bodies other than WAEC so as to remind them the importance of other exams.¹

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¹**Statement:** This is to certify that our research is a product of our collaborative effort. It is an original, with some literature review from other sources. Our research is not plagiarized – relevant statements of authors in the literature review are properly cited. We certify further that our research has never been reviewed nor published in any other scholarly journal. This certification is issued on 30th June 2021 for whatever legal and official purposes it may serve.

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Students' WAEC Performance in Nigeria

(Source: <https://guardian.ng/features>, 22/06/2020)

The students had more credits in NECO (National Examinations Council) than WAEC (West African Examinations Council) in the sampled schools; it could also be concluded that there was a significant relationship between students' performance in English Language in SSCE (Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination) WAEC and NECO for the year 2018 and 2019 respectively.