

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

*The study examined **the impact of** COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of final year Senior Secondary Year (SS3) Three students' in Ekiti State. It specially, examined the general performance of SS3 student in WASSCE examination between year 2016-2020. The study determined the performance of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations before covid-19 pandemic period and during Covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State and how covid-19 has affects the academic programme of Senior Secondary Schools. The study adopted ex-post facto design. Secondary data was collected from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ekiti State. The findings revealed that covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the academic performance of SS3 students in Ekiti State and affected the performance of final year secondary students in their WASSCE external examination. It was therefore, recommended that government should try as much as possible to provide and equip schools with enough ICT equipment and facilities that make up a better and standard e-learning and teaching environment and parents and stakeholders should also assist governments by contributing their own quota to the training of children.*

Keyword: Covid-19; academic performance; external examination; secondary schools.

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was firstly identified in Wuhan city, Hubei Province, China in December 2019 as a pneumonia of unknown origin. Later, the international committee on taxonomy of viruses (ICTV) identifies the causative agent of COVID-19 as a novel coronavirus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). COVID-19 outbreak spreads rapidly not only in China, but also worldwide, therefore, the World Health Organization (WHO) has announced it as pandemic on March 12, 2020 (UNESCO, 2020). The total number of confirmed cases and mortalities are 23,491,520 and

809,970, respectively, in 216 countries as of August 25, 2020 (Palden, 2020).

During this period of the pandemic, several governmental measures have been taken to cancel the risk of disease spreading. These measures include travel restrictions, mandatory quarantines for travelers, social distancing, bans on public gatherings, schools and universities closure, business closures, self-isolation, asking people to work at home, curfews, and lockdown. Authorities in several countries worldwide have declared either lockdown or curfew as a measure to break the fast spread of virus infection. These measures have a negative worldwide effect on the business, education, health, and tourism. In

between, movements were allowed, offices began functioning, schools and college reopened for selected levels and continued with online class for others. The measures taken by various countries across the world has affected all levels of the education system. It has led to the closure of schools and suspension of academic activities in institutions of learning globally.

Due to the suspension of classroom teaching in many schools and colleges, a switch to other approaches to teaching such as virtual learning, radio, television teaching and use of social media handles were adopted by government of countries as an alternative way to minimize physical contacts either between students themselves or between the students and the teachers. However, many students have no access to these alternative teaching modes due to lack of either the means or the instruments due to economical and digital divide. Consequently, Ogunode and Jegede (2021) opined that COVID-19 lockdown was likely to affect the academic performance of Senior Secondary Schools in the years' external examinations.

Students' effort and preparation towards their examination have been adversely affected by this global pandemic which has forced everyone into unprepared self-isolation. As at the period of the pandemic, Nigeria one the African developing country does not seem to have a well-developed e-learning platform for schools that can cushion the effect associated with loss of learning hours especially in the government owned public schools. Therefore, the impact of this pandemic was more likely to be strongly felt by the Senior Secondary final year candidates whose national examination comes up within the period of the lockdown and movement restrictions. To this end, little has been

said on the potential impact of COVID-19 on the educational sector and external examination done in Nigeria, especially its effects on the performance of senior secondary school students who sat for the national examinations such as West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) as well as the National Examination Council (NECO) examinations.

These external examinations are basic and required to prepare students for tertiary education. Secondary education, as defined by the National Policy on Education, is comprised of Basic Education and Post-Basic Education and Career Development in Nigeria (FGN, 2014). It is characterized by three (3) years junior secondary school known as Basic Education and three (3) years senior secondary school referred to as Post-Basic Education and Career Development. While Basic Education is the type of education a child receives immediately after primary education, Post-Basic Education is the education children receive after successful completion of Basic Education and having passed the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BACE). It is at the Post-Basic Education that children are prepared specifically to achieve the major purpose of secondary education which is to proceed to tertiary education having passed satisfactorily well in either the West African school certificate Examination (WASSCE) or National Examination Council (NECO) as the case may be. Therefore, one of the veritable tools for determining who proceeds from one level of education to the next level is an assessment and this is one of the reasons why assessment is seen as a very crucial component of secondary education in Nigeria.

In contemporary Nigeria, external examinations are conducted

by indigenous examination bodies such as West African Examinations Council (WAEC) which conducts the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The National Examination Council (NECO), responsible for the conduct of Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE); the National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) which conducts the National Technical Certificate (NTC) and National Business Certificate (NBC) examinations; the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) which conducts the Universities Matriculation Examinations (UME) etc. The context of this study only focuses on the WASSCE which is taken at the end of the secondary school phase.

West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE)

WASSCE is a type of standardized test conducted in West Africa countries. Students who pass the examination receive a certificate confirming their graduation from secondary education. It is administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and only offered to candidates residing in Anglophone West African countries. The academic school-learning qualification awarded upon successful completion of the examinations is the West African Senior School Certificate. The WASSCE tests the performance of students in all the core subjects offered in post-basic secondary education in Nigeria before any students can proceed to tertiary institutions. It serves as placement assessment.

Academic Performance

According to Arief (2019), scholars agree that students' academic achievement or performance is a 'net

result' of their cognitive and non-cognitive attributes as well as the sociocultural context in which the learning process takes places. Academic performance of students is a key feature in education (Anthony, 2018). It is considered to be the center around which the whole education system revolves. Asuru (2017) opined that the academic performance of students' determines the success or failure of any academic institution. Similarly, some other researchers asserted that student's academic performance serve as the bedrock for knowledge acquisition and the development of future skills. Additionally, some emphasized that the topmost priority of all educators is the academic performance of students. According to Abdullah (2016) in Longjohn and Audu (2020), academic performance is the knowledge gained which is assessed by marks by a teacher and/ or educational goals set by students and teachers to be achieved over a specific period of time. He added that these goals are measured by using continuous assessment or examination results. Completion of educational benchmarks such as secondary schools, diplomas and bachelor's degrees represent academic achievement. Academic achievement is commonly measured through examinations or continuous assessments but there is no general agreement on how it is best evaluated or which aspects are not important. Furthermore, there are inconclusive results over which individual factors successfully predict academic performance, elements such as test anxiety, environment motivation and emotions require consideration when developing models of school achievement. On the other hand, in public examinations/external examinations in Nigeria, there is some

call out in maintaining the quality of students' performance.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a problem associated with the covid-19 pandemic on the general academic performance of the final year Senior Secondary year three students during the Covid-19 period. Some of these problems include, many schools around the world either postponed or canceled all school activities to minimize gatherings and hence decrease the transmission of virus. However, these measures lead to higher economical, medical, and social implications on both students and teachers. Due to the suspension of classroom teaching in many schools, a switch to the online teaching for students was introduced. This form of learning provides an alternative way to minimize either the contact between students themselves or between the students and teachers. However, many students have no access to the online teaching due to lack of either the means or the instruments due to economical and digital divide. It reduced the interest of students in learning, despite the fact that the educational system of the country is not encouraging. These efforts made during covid-19 pandemic period appear to be inadequate to prepare the final year Senior Secondary year three students for their external examination such as West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO). It therefore become necessary to find out empirically whether covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the general academic performance of final year senior secondary students in Ekiti State.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of final year Senior Secondary Year Three students' in Ekiti State. Specifically, the study seeks to;

1. To examine the general performance of SS3 student between year 2016-2020.
2. To determine the performance of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations before covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State.
3. To compare the performance of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations before and during Covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study;

1. What is the students' enrollment and performance pattern in West African Senior Secondary Examination between years 2016 to 2020?
2. What is the performances of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations before Covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State?
3. What is the performances of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations during Covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State?

Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the performance of SS3 students in external examination before Covid-19 and during Covid-19 period in Ekiti State.

Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post facto research design and was conducted in

Ekiti State, Nigeria. The target population for the study comprised all the senior secondary three (SS3) students who wrote WAEC between 2016 to 2020 academic session in public and approved private schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The secondary data was collected from the Ekiti state Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data collected. The research questions

were analysed using the descriptive statistic of percentages, while the hypothesis was analysed with t-test inferential statistic.

Results

Research question 1: What is the students' enrolment and performance pattern in West African Senior Secondary Examination between years 2016 to 2020 in Ekiti State.

Table 1: Students' enrolment and performance pattern from 2016 to 2020.

Years	Total no registered (WAEC)				No with 5C's including mathematics & English			
	M	F	T	%	M	F	T	%
	Performance				Performance			
2016	4378	4239	8617	75.0	3089	2938	6027	53%
2017	4829	5036	9865	85.0	3798	4050	7848	67
2018	4444	4311	8755	80.0	2933	2637	5570	51
2019	4772	4588	9360	82.0	3898	4052	7950	70
2020	7954	6553	14507	62.35	4495	4550	9045	67.0

Table 1 shows that students' enrollment increased by 50% in year 2020 more than the previous years' enrolment. However, the overall average performance of year 2020 was 62.35 which was low compared to previous years. The table revealed that average performance in WASSCE examination were 75%, 85%, 80% and 82% for years 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. Findings from table

1 reveals that average performance in year 2020 WASSCE examination was low compared to the previous years despite the increase in enrolment.

Research Question 2: What is the performances of SSIII students in WASSCE examination before covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State?

Table 2: SSIII Students' Performance in WASSCE before Covid-19 Pandemic in Ekiti State.

Year/Examination type	Category	M	F	Total	%
2016 WAEC	No of student with credits and above	4378	4239	8617	75.0
	No with 5 credits including Math and Eng.	3089	2938	6027	53.0
	Total no of registered Students			11424	75.0
2017 WAEC	No of student with 5 credits and above	4829	5036	9865	85.0
	No with 5 credits including Math and Eng.	3798	4050	7848	67.0
	Total no of registered Students			11672	85.0%
2018 WAEC	No of student with 5 credits and above	4444	4311	8755	80.0
	No with 5 credits including Math and Eng.	2933	2637	5570	51.0
	Total no of registered Students			10973	80.0%

2019 WAEC	No of student with 5 credits and above	4772	4588	9360	82.0
	No with 5 credits including Math and Eng.	3898	4052	7950	70.0
	Total no of registered Students			11400	82.0

Table 2: Shows the percentage performance of students from 2016-2019 WAEC examination. No of students with credit and above during the 2016 WAEC was 8617(75.0%), while the numbers of students with five credits including mathematics and English was 6027(53%). Also, from 2017 WAEC, the numbers of students with five credits and above were 9865(85%), while the numbers of the students with five credits including mathematics and English were 7848(67%). Furthermore, numbers of students with five credit and above during the 2018 WAEC examination were 8755(80%), while numbers of

students with 5 credits including mathematics and English were 5570(51%). Lastly, on the table numbers of students with 5 credits and above were 9360(82.0%), while number with 5 credits including mathematics and English were 7950(70.0%). According to the table the highest number of student's performance was in the year 2017 WASSCE.

Research Question 3: What is the performances of SSS III students in WASSCE examinations during covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State?

Table 3: Analysis of SSIII Students performance in WASSCE examination during covid-19 pandemic period.

Year/Examination type	Category	M	F	Total	%
2020 WAEC	No of student with 5 credit and above	4129	603	10165	85.00
	No with 5 credits including Math and Eng.	4495	4550	9045	67.00
	Total no of registered Students			14507	62.35

Table 3 shows students' performance in WASSCE external examination during covid-19 pandemic period. 10165 students with 5 credits and above were gotten, while 9045 students representing 67.0% had five credits including mathematics and English

Hypothesis 1

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the students' performance in WASSCE external examination before covid-19 period and performance during covid-19 period.

Table 4: t-test analysis of difference in the performance of students in WASSCE before covid-19 and during covid-19 period.

Categories	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-val	Remark
Before Covid-19	11367	43.45	22.19	27.311	11.65	1.79	
During Covid-19	14507	55.09	24.98				

From table 4, the mean scores of performance of students in external examination before covid-19 (43.45) which is less than the mean scores of

performance of students during covid-19 (55.09), with a mean difference of (11.64). Its measure of variability has difference of (2.79). The *t-test* analysis

show that $t(\text{cal})$ (11.65) is higher than the $t(\text{tab})$ (1.79) at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. This indicated that there was significant difference between the performance of students in external examination before Covid-19 and during Covid-19 period. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. Students' performance before covid-19 period was higher than performance during covid-19.

Discussion

From the findings of this study, it was revealed that the average number of registered students before covid-19 who sat for WASSEC were lower compared to the numbers of registered students who sat for the examination during covid-19. This study showed that, despite the lockdown and various restrictions put in place by government and institutions, students' enrolment for WASSEC increased and even went beyond the range of increase in the previous years.

Findings revealed that performance of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations before Covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State was moderate compared to the performance of senior secondary school students during covid-19. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a major disruption in the educational system, much of which is still being understudied due to the severity of its effects (Zethembe 2020). This was due to the non-academic and extra curriculum activities engaged by the students at home during the lockdown period while some were not studying at all. The performance of students in external examination before covid-19 was below expectations compared to the 2020 WASSEC examination which was during the covid-19 pandemic. It was

opined that examinations written within the covid-19 period would be adversely affected due to students' inability to access normal classroom teaching and learning facilities and adequate preparations for the examination (Ogunode & Jegede, 2021). This study revealed that students' performance was seriously affected as it is observed that the performances recorded particularly in Ekiti state before covid-19 were better than the performance during covid-19. The findings of this study were in line with the findings of Elejere, (2018) who comparatively analyzed students' performance in West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination between 2014-2016. The findings as reported by WAEC chief examiners showed that candidates' performance in the external examinations always improve year after year. The performance of students in year 2020 during covid-19 did not follow this pattern as compared to the previous years (WAEC 2016- 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was discovered that the performance of Senior Secondary year three students' in external examinations before Covid-19 pandemic period in Ekiti State was moderate compared to the performance of senior secondary school students during covid-19. This study showed that covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a major disruption in the educational system and has impacted on the academic performance of senior secondary students in Ekiti State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Government should provide and equip schools with enough ICT

- equipment/facilities that make up a better and standard e-learning and teaching environment.
- ii. Government should also support and encourage teachers by organising seminars and workshops on some special teaching methods, including virtual teaching and learning from time to time in order to increase their performances during crisis period
 - iii. Parents and other stakeholders should assist governments by contributing their own quota to provide ICT support for their children/wards during crisis period.

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