AN EFFECTIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK: A SOLUTION TO MASS FAILURE IN SSCE MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract
The unsatisfactory performance of secondary school students in the senior school certificate examinations most especially in the two core subjects i.e. English Language and Mathematics, have been the concern of many individuals and groups in our country (Nigeria). In fact, government, educational bodies and parents always bemoan the decreasing performance of students in these examinations. The problem of mass failure in English and Mathematics becomes increasingly worrisome especially considering how governments at all levels are doing all possible to address the issue. This paper therefore, describes an effective policy framework as a solution to the problem of mass failure in senior school examinations. The paper examines the concept of mass failure, causes of mass failure, as well as possible remedies to mass failure. The paper also recommends that Government needs to take a holistic look at our education most especially in secondary school level with a view to resuscitating it from its present distress. Parents should also monitor the activities of their children at home very closely and should not over burden them with household activities since this make them pay less attention to their books.

Keywords: Policy framework, mass failure, senior secondary certificate examinations, English, Mathematics

Introduction
The Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) is the final examination written by students in Nigerian secondary schools at the end of their six years education in secondary school. The SSCE is conducted by two different examination boards: the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO). The current SSCE curriculum requires students to take a total of 8-9 subjects, with English Language and Mathematics as core Subjects. According to Patton (2004), Policy analysis is "The process through which we identify and evaluate alternative policies or programs that are intended to lessen or resolve social, economic, or physical problems." According to Geva-May and Pal (2001), Policy analysis involved "determining which of various policies will achieve a given set of goals in light of the relations between the policies and the goals.

A lot of concerned individuals and groups have continuously decried the woeful performances of secondary school students in certificate examinations, with special focus on English language and
mathematics. In fact, governments, educational bodies and parents yearly bemoan the dwindling performances of their students in these Examinations. Poor performances in English language and mathematics become extremely nauseating to stakeholders owing to the importance of English language and mathematics in the educational development of the students. For instance, admissions into higher institutions is impossible without a pass in English just as a good understanding of English helps learners to grasp easily other school subjects. The problem of poor performances in English and mathematics becomes increasingly worrisome especially when it seems to all that governments at all levels are doing all possible to redress the situation. What with the pride of place given to English language as spelt out in the National Policy on Education? What with the more time allocated to the teaching of English language and Mathematics on the school time-table? What with the constant use of English language as the major language of interaction among the students in the school environment? The trend of poor performance in English language and mathematics has continually been downslide.

Mass Failure in SSCE Examinations
A great number of researchers have continuously been probing into the causes of mass failures in our schools and suggesting ways of reversing the ugly trend. The responsibility for the lackluster performances has been characterized by a series of buck passing. Kalusi, (1992) posit that, a major challenge in the area of teaching English as a second language is the shortage of foreign textbooks, as available Nigerian books are not written within the readability level of the students. Hence, a lot of students read at frustration level. Deng, (1997) argues that incessant strikes by the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and constant closure of schools affect performances in English language and Mathematics. Akpotu (1988) argues that a reason for students’ woeful performances in examinations is that the teachers lack communicative competence in English. If this is the case with many teachers, particularly teachers of English language, our expectation from the learners then should be nothing short of poor performances in examinations.

The above stance calls to mind the instructive position of the Federal Government in the National Policy on Education (2013) that ‘no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers’. Deng (1997) aver that text messages and its orthography ‘is gradually being adopted by Nigerian students’ and ‘would invariably adulterate the standard of English usage in Nigeria’. Wokocha (2001) subscribes to the view that infrastructure plays a major role in the teaching and learning of English Language and that negative consequences of lack of infrastructure are grave. Other problems identified include inconsistency on the part of government, the emergence of Nigerian English (NE), mother-tongue interference (Otive, 2006), poverty (Lacour & Tissington, 2011), imbalance in learner/teacher ratio, learner readiness/maturity, poor teacher/learner motivation, indiscipline among learners (and teachers) as well as examination malpractice (Kalusi, 2001).

There is no gainsaying that the litany of problems identified have been impeding on students’ Performances in examinations since decades but what is more worrisome than the problem of poor performances itself is that despite the series of solutions proffered to the problems, there seems to be no end in sight.
Causes of Mass Failure

A lot of mass failures in various examination are now been recorded yearly. The recent 2017 WAEC results have shown that over 68 percent of the 1.6 million candidates have failed either Mathematics or English – which are prerequisite for getting admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria as against 65 and 60 in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Only about 30 percent got five credits including Mathematics and English. That was against 35 percent and 38 percent for 2019 and 2018 respectively. Also, about 8.4 percent of the results were nullified. Even the traditional NECO that students pass with flying colors is now in comatose.

The NECO 2018 results show that over 52 percent failed in either Mathematics or English. Even in our tertiary institutions, the cases of spill over and Students graduating with pass degrees are on the increase. The questions that one ask himself are, why this Mass failure? Causes of the failure? How can we remedy them? Therefore, some of the causes of massive failure in SSCE Examination include the following:

1. Effects of Social Networks and Media: Twitter, Face Book, What sup, and generally browsing on the internet instead of reading their books. Even during the time of examinations, one will still see students online. Whether on Face book, Twitter, 2go etc. People from thirteen years are allowed to register on these networks. Therefore, they spend most of their time on these networks instead of them “facing their books

2. Lack of quality education, educators and learning environment: The teachers are half-beaked graduates that are also product of corrupt teachers and schools. The environment is not favorable for learning. Twenty students par twenty foot square room.

3. Lack of well and proper examinations standard: Different schools with different curriculum. WAEC standard, NECO standard etc.

4. Lack of robust and articulated orientation for the students: Many students do not know the format of UTME, NECO etc. They thought it was like their ordinary school exams.

5. English Premier League and European Football Leagues, it is easy for an average Nigerian teenager to know the names of all Chelsea players but same youths cannot tell you the square root 25 in mathematic. Worse still is that these days instead of seeing inscriptions like UNIVERISTY or SCHOLARS on the exercise books, what you see are pictures of Paloma, Drogba, Beyonce, Omotola etc

6. DSTV, Home video and African movie magic, watching television and films endlessly. European champions league, English premiership, Barca, Blues, Chelsea, Man U etc.

7. GSM Text Language; Most of the students write words like ur (instead of Your), 2moro (For tomorrow) in their Exam sheets.

8. Ever Busy Parents: Parents are always in search for money, business and jobs, they live home 5am and come back 10pm leaving their children to the care of house helps and teachers in private schools. They have forgotten that out of the 24 hours in a day their children will only spend 8am-2pm(6 hrs) in school and in hands of the teachers the remaining 18hrs is spent in the home(weather sleep or not). These same ever busy parents cannot look into the books of their teenagers, they don't monitor what the teenagers watch nor who they associate with.
9. Weak Government Policies: The people in Government see all these vanities on television and radio and they will not nip them in the bud, because they are naive and corrupt and so the rot continues.

Possible Remedies

All those problems among many others can be remedied. The first answer to avoiding mass examinations failures lies on the qualitative teaching and learning materials as well as environment. Also in the national education policy. E.g. conducive environment, including feeding, recreation should be ensured among the basic for conducive atmosphere for learning. Before taking school teachers, their ability to impact the needed knowledge should be a top priority not just certificate. That is very imperative for the promotion of knowledge. Regulation of access to social networks in schools especially during study, lectures and examinations times.

Below are other possible remedies to this disturbing scenario:

1. In order to prevent this, government needs to take a holistic look at our education at the secondary school level with a view to resuscitating it from its present distress. It should urgently carry out an audit of teachers in our public secondary schools with a view to flushing out the unqualified ones among them. It is a discredit to the entire educational system to have many unqualified teachers in our secondary schools while many qualified and well trained teachers remain perpetually unemployed.

2. Again government both at the federal and state levels should as a matter of urgency employ more teachers for secondary schools to ensure efficiency and optimal performance. A situation where teachers up to three or four subjects in a school is not healthy. Also the phasing out of boarding system in most of our secondary schools is inimical to the system and should be revisited urgently. In the past, the boarding system helped to regulate the activities of students towards academic excellence and good moral upbringing. By living together, students learnt a lot from one another and also encouraged one another academically.

3. Government both at all levels should resuscitate boarding facilities in our secondary schools and encourage parents to allow their children to live in them rather than go to schools from private houses. Again, critical assessment of the performance of students should be emphasized. To this end, the idea of mass promotion of students from one class to another should be totally discouraged and discarded. This will ultimately encourage students to work extra hard to earn promotion from one class to another and prevent the presentation of ill-prepared candidates for these two examinations.

4. Again, the idea of aiding examination malpractice by teachers in secondary schools should be seriously checked as this has often given these students the false impression that hard work is of no use since they will receive assistance from their teachers during these examinations. WAEC and NECO officials should therefore monitor their examinations critically to ensure that malpractice of any sort is reduced to the barest minimum.

5. The Federal and State Governments should as a matter of necessity ensure the availability of text books for students in our secondary schools. We shall be expecting too much from these students if they don’t have adequate books to help them prepare well for their examinations and yet want them to pass in flying colors.
6. It should also be stressed that parents have a major role to play in the educational development of their children. They should complement the laudable efforts of government in providing reading materials for their children. While at home, they should monitor the activities of their children closely. They could do this by ensuring that their children devote more time to reading their books and doing their assignments and spend less time watching movies.

7. Again, parents should not over-burden their children with a lot of household responsibilities at home since such errands will make them pay less attention to their books. No effort should be spared in ensuring that our secondary school students who are the leaders of tomorrow do well in these two examinations since their future to a large extent may depend on what they make out of it.

8. From their part, teachers have to start grooming their students, right from the beginning of their senior classes of three year programme, preparing them for the series of internal exams but with the ultimate aim of presenting them for the Certificate examination.

9. Regulation of access to social networks in schools especially during study, lectures and examinations times.

As a result of the fact that numerous solutions proposed by scholars seemed not to be working or are not even experimented with for reasons, these remedies should be employed in the administration of secondary schools, because English language and Mathematics teaching and learning, improve student’s academic performances in other school subjects and would translate into better results in certificate examinations.

Conclusion
The performance of students in Senior Secondary School in Nigeria has remained an issue of concern to all stakeholders (Olawepo, 2004). The report by Adesina (1990) on the survey of the performance of candidates in science subjects in Nigeria over the years revealed a discernible decline. This perennial decline has remained a source of concern to science educators, mathematicians and mathematics educators (Abisogun-Alo, 2004). As such therefore, government needs to take a holistic look at our education at the secondary school level with a view to resuscitating it from its present distress. Also at home Parents should monitor the activities of their children closely. They could do this by ensuring that their children devote more time to reading their books and doing their assignments and spend less time watching movies.

Recommendations
1. Government needs to take a holistic look at our education at the secondary school level with a view to resuscitating it from its present distress. It should urgently carry out an audit of teachers in our public secondary schools with a view to flushing out the unqualified ones among them.

2. Government both at the federal and state levels should as a matter of urgency employ more teachers for secondary schools to ensure efficiency and optimal performance.

3. Government both at all levels should resuscitate boarding facilities in our secondary schools and encourage parents to allow their children to live in them rather than go to schools from private houses.
4. W.A.E.C. and N.E.C.O. officials should therefore monitor their examinations critically to ensure that malpractice of any sort is reduced to the barest minimum.

5. The Federal and State Governments should as a matter of necessity ensure the availability of English language and Mathematics text books for students in our secondary schools. We shall be expecting too much from these students, if they don’t have adequate books to help them prepare well for their examinations and yet want them to pass in flying colors.

6. Regulation of access to social networks in schools especially during study, lectures and examinations times.

7. While at home Parents, should monitor the activities of their children closely. They could do this by ensuring that their children devote more time to reading their books and doing their assignments and spend less time watching movies.

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