School Libraries as Panaceas for Mass Failure in West African Senior School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper attempted to explain school libraries as reliable and dependable panaceas for mass failure in West African Examination Council Senior School Certificate Examinations (WAEC SSCE). The paper began with an introduction highlighting various comments and views on reports of mass failure in SSCE in recent years in Nigeria. This was followed by providing a brief on the concept of West African Examination Council. Percentages of students that passed SSCE from 2008 to 2012 with five credits including English Language and Mathematics were obtained from newspapers and online reports and shown in tables to confirm the claim of mass failure of students in the WAEC examinations in recent years. School libraries and their capacity to improve student performance were discussed. Some recommendations were made as regards putting in place world class school libraries in Nigerian schools and committing them to regular use by the students for success in examinations.
Keywords: School library, panacea, mass failure, examination.

1. Introduction

For quite some time now, there has been growing concern about mass failure in Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). The legislators are not left in the worries over this trend thus their resolve to investigate the problems. Several reasons for this worrisome malaise have been identified with suggested solutions by individuals and newspaper comments and editorials.

Among the reasons outlined as causes of mass failure include nonchalance attitude of pupils, youth disillusions and uncared   attitude of parents about their children (Bellow, Osagie, 2013). Others are dilapidated infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning facilities, poor teacher motivation, abysmal funding and incompetent teachers (The Guardian, 2011). (Ajayi, 2011) mentioned some problems as parents' failure to pay attention to the needs of their children and lack of value orientation, corruption and less emphasis on hard work, television viewing and unregulated internet, face book surfing and abuse of mobile telephone use while (Adesola-Ohaha, 2013) said dying culture of readings amongst the children also contributed to the problem of mass failure in the examinations. However, a critical review of the above views and comments showed that poor state, underutilization or lack of school libraries was not observed as one of the reasons for mass failure in School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria.

This paper therefore attempts to present and suggest school libraries as panaceas for mass failure in
Senior School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria.

2. Concept of West African Examination Council (WAEC)

The West African Examination Council is a West Africa's foremost examining board established in 1952 by law to determine the examinations required in the public interest in the English Speaking West African countries to conduct the examinations and to award certificates comparable to those of equivalent examining authorities internationally. The council by this mandate is expected to:

1.   Assist in the development of sound education
2.   Ensure that educational standards are maintained
3.   Give the people of West Africa a vision of the great potentials which lie beyond examinations

Her vision is to be a world class examining body adding value to the educational goals of its stakeholders, while the mission is to remain Africa's foremost examination body, providing qualitative and reliable, educational assessment, encouraging academic and moral excellence and promoting sustainable human resource development and international cooperation.

2.1. Tables Showing Percentages of WAECSSCE and GCE O'Level Results from 2008 – 2012

2.1.1. The table below shows the percentage of performance in the May – June Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) from 2008 – 2012 with five credit including English Language and Mathematics

YEAR	% OF CANDIDATES WITH 5 CREDITS INCLUDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICS
2008	23.5%
2009	25.99%
2010	24.94%
2011	30.70%
2012	20.04%

2.1.2. The Table following shows the percentage of performance in the November – December GCE 'O' level examinations from 2008 – 2012 with five credits including English Language and Mathematics.

YEAR	% OF CANDIDATES WITH 5 CREDITS INCLUDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICS
2008	23.54%
2009	21.99%
2010	20.4%
2011	36.07%
2012	36.09%

Sources: Newspaper and online reports of released results by WAEC (see references)

The reports obviously confirmed the consistent mass failure of students in WAEC School Certificate Examinations in recent years.

2.2. School Libraries

Spelling (2006) said that one of the cornerstones of no Child Left Behind is teaching children how to read. She said school libraries play a critical role by providing children with books and resources so that they can improve their reading skills and achieve at high levels. School libraries lead the way for technology use in schools. Fitzsimmons (2007) stressed that a critical part of the comprehensive and renewed strategy to ensure that student learn to read and are effective users of information and ideas is requirement that every school have a school library and school libraries be staffed by highly qualified certified school librarians or school library media specialists.

Petters and Ottong (2012) described a school library as an information centre located within the school environment whose task is to identify and collect, process, organize, store, preserve, retrieve and disseminate information pertinent to the needs of members of the school community with the view of satisfying their changing information need. Obaitan (2004) described the library as a collection of books and other forms of records, housed, organized and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of people for information, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment. School libraries found at the primary and secondary school levels are established for the development of teaching, learning and passing examinations.

Elaturoti (1998) listed the school library media centre resources to include, books, periodical, newspaper, pamphlets, brochures, handbills, and ephemeral notices, audio materials (disc, phonographic records, audio-tapes on reels and cassettes), film materials (slides, film-strips, motion picture films as well as other forms of photographic film), graphics, video materials (video-tapes on reels, cassettes and cartridges as well as video disc), Realia (toys, games, model and actual specimens) and microforms (microfilm, microfiche and microcard). Morris (2004) highlighted other school library resources to include, information communication technology facilities such as computers, computer diskettes, computer programmes, multi-media collection, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, audio graphic communications, Broadcast TV/Radio + audio-teleconferencing and interactive multimedia. He emphasized the need for annual financial provisions for the replenishment of school library stock

According to NCLIS (2008), no longer are school libraries just for books, they have become 'school library media centers' with computer resources that enable children to engage meaningfully with a wide variety of information. These centres with trained staff, support the use of electronic information resources not just in the centres, but help to integrate these resources in classroom and throughout the curriculum.   Halsey et.al (2009), explained that school libraries serve elementary schools, middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools. School libraries support various educational programs; develop students' skill in locating and using information. School libraries promote reading culture. Teachers use school libraries to access information needed to develop

and support their classroom instruction. Students use the materials in school libraries to perform their class work. Halsey et.al (2009) further stressed that school libraries usually maintain collections in a variety of media. In addition to books, magazine, and newspapers, schools libraries may contain photographs, films, sound and video recordings, computers, CD-ROMS, games, maps, realia, or real artifacts such as various types of stones e.t.c. for study. Rich school libraries must have computer labs with workstations software and internet connections. This is why they are often referred to as school library media centers. Ike (1983) examines the role of school libraries in the successful implementation of the then new National Policy on Education when she listed the following as the aims of school libraries:

(a)   To introduce the school children to expanding world of knowledge
(b)   To develop in school children, a life-long reading-habit, including the use of library materials for pleasure, relaxation, self-development and reference purpose.
(c)   To teach school children to learn on their own, without the aid of teachers.
(d)   To support the curriculum of schools.
(e)   To support the creative activities of the pupils and their teachers.

2.3. Condition of School Libraries in Nigeria

The state of school libraries in Nigeria is appalling. Most public school libraries exist in names. The buildings allocated for most libraries are very bad. Petters and Ottong (2012) opined that since the introduction of school library into Nigeria in 1946, the process of school library development recently seems to be slow and many schools are yet to have good libraries or have adequately equipped ones. Atagher and Adung (2002) lamented the state of the school libraries in Nigeria as a whole. They described it as pathetic. The school libraries where they exist, the facilities are inadequate and the books are haphazardly organized and arranged.

Ajegbomogun and Salaam identified some of problems of school libraries in Nigeria as declining financial support, inadequate infrastructure and equipment, employment of unqualified personnel, low level of information technology. The buildings housing the library do not merit the standard specification in terms of library space per pupils while the furniture is grossly inadequate. Ojoade (1993) stressed that school libraries in Nigeria do exist in secondary schools, but many almost in names, because all the elements required for them to operate are not put in place. School libraries are sometimes converted to classrooms or where staffs meeting are held without any consideration to whether such will be conducive for learning. Most school libraries in Nigeria lack tables, chairs, fans; shelves etc., the absence of these facilities continue to retard information advancement in Nigeria. Most school libraries are run by non-academic staff or full time teachers who lack library training skills and this do not augur well for school library development. Materials in the libraries are in disarray.

Obayemi (2002) deplored the neglect of library and its development in some government owned secondary schools in Lagos state. The libraries were grossly underfunded, understaffed, understocked and unorganized. Books and other educational materials are archaic. Current materials are irrelevant to the curriculum and syllabuses required for passing different segment of school examinations. Pupils are not encouraged or enticed to make use of the libraries by the teachers. Teachers themselves do not make use of libraries to update their knowledge and give assignments to pupils to solve from the school libraries thus making them inaccessible to students and teachers. School libraries lack professional librarians to manage them. Adetoro (2004) studied a comparative analysis of school libraries development and use in selected public and private school in Ogun State and found that the schools use improvised accommodation, lacks qualified personnel while the library are occasionally and infrequently used. All the tiers of the government and sectors responsible for the school library development are lukewarm.

2.4. School Libraries as Panaceas for Mass Failure in School Examinations

It is no gainsaying that students' performance in examinations is anchored on the availability and utilization of model, well-equipped school libraries in Nigerian secondary schools. The reasons are not farfetched. First, According to Curry, Rodney and Hamilton-Pennell (2005) is the fact that a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of socio economic or education levels of the adults in the community. They said powerful libraries make powerful learners. Secondly, according to Lonsdale (2003) and Roscello and Webster (2004) is that a strong computer networks connecting the library's resources to the classrooms and laboratories has an impact on student achievement. Thirdly, test scores are higher when there is higher usage of the school libraries (Lonsdale, 2003 and Curry, Rodney and Russell, 2007). The quality of the collection also has an impact on student learning and success.

Lonsdale (2003) further discovered that collaborative relationship between classroom teachers and school librarians have a significant impact on learning, particularly in relation to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers. In addition, a print-rich environment leads more to reading, and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability, and writing style. More so, integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students' mastery of both content and information seeking skills. School

libraries can make a positive difference to student's self – esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning. The role of school library is very crucial to learning as it provides the rudiments to learning, gives information that can change people's lives to a better one, encourages students to study, learn and achieve better results as well as provides confidence to look for information on their own at different levels. School library services is very crucial and indispensable to any form of education; elementary, tertiary and eventually lifelong learning. Fitzsimmons (2006) pointed out that school library collections inform, educate, enrich students at all levels. When students are able to explore information that is meaningful to them, they not only learn faster but their literacy grow rapidly; they learn how to learn

Bush (2002) summed it up that "A good library launches young children on a journey of exploration and discovery, teaching them how to ask questions and find answers. And the wonderful thing is that once you learn to use a library, the doors to learning are open to you throughout your life. School libraries help teachers teach and children learn''. In addition, "Children and teachers need library resources – especially books - and the expertise of a librarian to succeed. Books, information technology, and school librarians who are part of the schools' professional team are basic ingredients for student achievement". It is obvious from the foregoing that school libraries have established themselves as reliable and dependable panaceas for mass failure in schools' examinations.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above discussion it is clear that if good, well stocked functional school libraries are mounted in public schools and utilized adequately by teachers and students, there is no doubt that students' performance in school certificate examinations will improve significantly. The following are therefore recommended for improvement in school library services in Nigeria:

1. There is need for complete overhauling of school library system in Nigeria.
2. A world class school library structure with modern equipment, facilities and qualified staff should be put in place in all primary and secondary schools.
3. Apart from their existence, the libraries must be well stocked with required, relevant and current information resources strictly curriculum and examinations syllabus oriented.
4. Government and library management should ensure the development of a multimedia based collection. This enables individual learning and makes learning interesting.
5. There is also the need for regular maintenance and renovation of library facilities
6. Government and schools should also encourage pupils to use the libraries while opening hours of the libraries should be extended beyond school hours to give pupils the opportunity of using the library. Teachers can encourage the pupils to use the library by giving them assignments that will take them to the library on a regular basis.
7. There is need for collective action by individuals, philanthropists, organizations, and government to salvage the development of school libraries in Nigeria.
8. Finally, the federal, State and Local governments need to place more priority on the funding of school libraries.

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