

Factors Responsible for Poor Performance of Students' in English Language in the West Africa Senior High School Certificate Examination in Ghana Senior High School, Tamale

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Abstract

The poor performance of students in English language in the West Africa Senior High School Certificate Examination in Ghana Senior High School, Tamale is a great concern to key stakeholders of the School. Many factors are responsible for this poor performance. This study therefore seeks to establish the factors responsible for poor performances of students in English language. The investigation collected information on factors responsible for the poor performance of students in English language in the West Africa Senior High School Certificate Examination and the ranking of these factors. It revealed that the factors include: non-availability of qualified teachers, attitude of teachers in teaching English Language, students' attitude to studying English Language, use of teaching and learning materials, allocation of time for teaching English language and methods of teaching English Language. It was also observed that non-availability of qualified teachers of English language (40%) ranked highest while students attitude to the study of English language and the allocation of time for teaching English language on the schools time table ranked lowest (5%)

Keywords: factors, poor, performance, responsible

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1. Introduction

English language plays a central and strategic role in the school system because almost all the school subjects are taught using English language. The place of English Language and its objectives as revealed in the secondary school curriculum cannot be substituted. The terminal objectives of English language include: providing students with a sound linguistic basis for further learning in secondary, tertiary and vocational institutions; equipping school learners with a satisfactory level of proficiency in English language usage in their places of work; promoting the art of spoken English as medium for national and international communication; enhancing and developing further the various skills and competences already acquired at primary and junior secondary levels (Odesina & Ikegulu, 1992 in Atanda & Jaiyeoba, 2011). Adegbile (1999) in Atanda & Jaiyeoba, (2011) attested to the fact that a child cannot learn most of the elementary facts or ideas unless he or she understands the language in which these ideas are expressed.

Following extensive research, several researchers have suggested different approaches to the inculcation of the study of English language in the child. Nattall (1992) in Osatimehin & Dada (2012) analyzed some of the indicators of performance of students in English language at the secondary school level. He also asserted that there was no single cause but a combination of adverse indicators which are interrelated. These include teachers' factors, school environment, technological needs/ instructional materials, interference of mother tongue, readiness in learning, visual and auditory skills, and curriculum implementation. These indicators to the teaching and learning of English language at the secondary school have become a sensitive issue that should be taken with seriousness. Olugbodi (2003) in Osatimehin & Dada (2012) also stated that teachers are required to make students become more balanced through teaching and setting of high goals regarding competence in the language to be learnt. The teacher should be a good model and should let the learners really use the language to achieve communicative competence. Olugbodi (2006) in Osatimehin & Dada (2012) asserted that teachers are producers of knowledge and by teaching the learners one additional language besides their mother tongues, they should know the different kinds of problems and how these affect the intellectual, social, emotional and cultural lives of their students. There is also the need to have knowledge of the students' cultural backgrounds as they attempt to teach them new language. Azikwe (1998) cited in Osatimehin & Dada (2012) affirmed that the development of the ability to learn the second language was one of the most important responsibilities of the language teacher. According to them, English language competence was important because it was essential to personal enrichment and the development of intelligent citizenship. Having known linguistic, cultural, socio-linguistic, political and psychological problems of English language, the teacher should be in a better position to reduce these problems.

Mohammed (1995) in Osatimehin & Dada (2012) in his own view, observed that students' proficiency in English as measured by WAEC seemed to be declining rapidly, particularly since the failure rate in the last five years had been in the region of 70- 75% annually. Awonusi (2004) in Osatimehin & Dada (2012), noticed that

secondary schools with qualified and specialist teachers usually produce the best students in terms of academic performance and communicative competence.

At the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination level, a credit or failure in English language determines to a great extent, the educational advancement of Senior Secondary School students (Atanda & Jaiyeoba, 2011). However, the achievement of students in the subject most especially in external examination has been a source of concern to parents, teachers, educators and researchers. The West African Examinations Council Chief Examiners' Report (1996 to 2007) as well as the statistics of WAEC results (1996 – 2006) showed that 516,196 students sat for the examination in 1996, only 58, 533 representing 11.3 % had between A1 to C6 in English language. These were the only candidates who could use the results to advance to higher levels provided they had credits in the subjects relevant to their proposed courses of study. On the other hand, 124,041 (24 %) candidates had between D7 to E8. With this, one could deduce that the total failure would have been the addition of candidates with D7 – E8 and F9 including absentees. Thus, 461, 126 (representing 89.33 %) candidates failed. The achievement declined consistently until 2001, when the percentage of candidates with A1 – C6 was 26.1 %. Between 2001 and 2006, it fluctuated. In summary, the percentage of students with A1 – C6 between 1995 and 2006 did not go beyond 32 %. This is a serious concern to education stakeholders. In this regard, the next subsection of this research work states the problem of the study.

1.1 Problem Statement

The poor performance of students in English language over the years in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) cannot be overlooked. The trend has remained the same for about a decade now. As a result, most of the students are being delayed from advancing in their studies to higher schools of learning because of their inability to obtain the appropriate grade in the subject, which is a prerequisite for admission into any programme in the tertiary institutions. It is against this background that this study was conducted to:

1. Identify the factors responsible for poor performances of students in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination
2. Rank these factors responsible for poor performances of students in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination

Research Questions

1. What are the factors responsible for the poor performance of students in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination?
2. How are these factors responsible for poor performances of students in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination ranked?

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Ghana Senior High School in Tamale, Ghana. The study involved the five courses pursued in the school namely: Arts, Business, Agriculture, Science and Home Economics. To avoid being biased and to improve the validity and reliability of the study, the random sampling technique was employed in selecting 40 students each from the five classes giving a total of 200 students as the study population. Even though, some primary data was gathered by the researcher through informal interviews, structured questionnaire was designed and administered to the 200 students. This was conducted with the aim of eliciting information on their opinion on the factors responsible for the poor performance of students in the in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination, in Ghana Senior High School. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions and was presented in the form of frequencies, percentages, scores (tables) for easy understanding and interpretation.

Table 1 Demographic data of study sampled

Variables	Number	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	120	60
Female	80	40
Age range of respondents		
12- 15	40	80
16- 19	50	100
20- 23	10	20
Education of parents		
Informal	160	80
Formal	40	20

Source: field data, November 2012

From the survey it was observed that 60% of the respondents were males while 40% were females. In

relation to ages, most of the students 60% were between the ages of 16-19 years while 10% of them were in the age range of 20-23 years. In terms of education of parents, majority 80% of the students' parents' had no formal education while a few 20% had formal education.

Table 2 Distribution of the sample size of the five classes

Class	Total Number	Sampled Size
Arts	82	40
Business	80	40
Agriculture	90	40
Science	81	40
Home Economics	84	40
Total	417	200

Source: field data November 2012

From the survey it is clear that the total population of the five classes was 417 while the study sample was 200. Also, the populations of each class varied with the highest being the Agriculture class with 90 students, the least, the Home Economics class, with 80 students.

3.0 Results and Discussions

From the survey it was observed that 60% of the respondents were males while 40% were females. In relation to ages most of the students 50% were between the ages of 16-19 years while (0% of them were in the age range of 20- 23 years. In terms of education of parents, majority 80% of the students' parents' had informal education while a few 20% had formal education.

It was also clear that the total population of the five classes was 417 while the study sampled study was 200. Also, the populations of each class varied with the highest being the Agriculture class with 90 students and the least being the Home Economics class with 80 students.

Research Question 1: What are the factors responsible for the poor performance of students in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination in Ghana Senior High School in Tamale?

The data captured factors responsible for the poor performance of students' in English language in the West Africa Senior High School Certificate Examination (WASCE) in Ghana Senior High School, Tamale. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Factors responsible for student's poor performance in English Language

Class	Factors identified
All five classes	Availability of qualified teachers Attitude of teachers in teaching English Language Students attitude to studying English Language Use of teaching and learning materials Allocation of English language on school time table Method of teaching the English Language

Source: field data, November 2012

From the table it is revealed that non - availability of qualified teachers, attitude of teachers in teaching English Language, students attitude to studying English Language, use of teaching and learning materials, allocation of English language on school time table and method of teaching the English Language were identified as being responsible factors for the poor performance of students' in English language in the West Africa Senior High School Certificate Examination (WASCE) in Ghana Senior High School, Tamale. This is in agreement with the study conducted by Sahibzada, Saeedi and Hossaini (2018) at Kandahar University on the causes of literature students' poor English skills, where lack of professional teachers in school, lack of effective learning strategies and non-standard textbooks were identified as major factors.

Research Question 2: How are these factors ranked in poor performance of students in English language in the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination?

The study also investigated the ranking of the factors. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Ranked Factors identified to be responsible for student's poor performance in English

Variables	Number of students	percentage %
Use of teaching and learning materials	60	30
Attitude of teachers in teaching English Language	40	20
Non-availability of qualified teachers	80	40
Students attitude to studying English Language	10	5
Allocation of English language on school time table	10	5
Total	200	100

Source: field data, November 2012

From the table it was observed that use of teaching and learning materials was 30% ,attitude of teachers in teaching English language 20% and non -availability of qualified teachers 40% ,while students attitude to studying English language and time allocation for teaching English language on the school time was 5% respectively.

Eighty students representing 40% ranked non-availability of qualified English language teachers, while 10 students representing 5% indicated students attitude to the study of English language and the allocation for English language on the school time table both ranked low respectively. This agrees with the findings of Awonusi (2004) in Osatimehin & Dada (2012), which states that secondary schools with qualified and specialist teachers in the specific subject areas usually produce the best students in terms of academic performance and communicative competence.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study showed that non-availability of qualified English teachers, attitude of teachers in teaching English Language, student's attitude to studying English Language, use of teaching and learning materials, allocation of English language on school time table and Method of teaching the English Language were some of the causes of the students poor performance in English language at Ghana Senior High School, Tamale. It also revealed that non-availability of qualified English language teachers 40% ranked highest while students attitude to the study of English language and the allocation for English language on the school time table ranked lowest 5%

It is hereby recommended that stakeholders of the school should focus on the non-availability of qualified English teachers since it ranked high 40% while efforts are being made to tackle the other factors. A research on improving teacher's competencies in the teaching of English language should be conducted by other researchers in Ghana.

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