

EXAMINERS' PERCEPTION OF THE NECO/SSCE MARKING EXERCISE

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Abstract

The act that established National Examinations Council (NECO) expects that her operations and output will compare favourably with other public examination bodies like the West African Examinations Council that examine and award certificates to candidates at the same level. In essence, it was expected that NECO 's result will enjoy the same or even better acceptability as the existing examination bodies. This expectation was jeopardized in the wake of criticisms that followed her first conduct of SSCE. The results were welcomed with controversies. This study therefore took steps to get to the root cause of the problem with an ultimate aim of providing a way out of the predicament. One thousand two hundred and ninety NECO Examiners from three States and the FCT responded to a questionnaire on their perception of the marking exercise of NECO/SSCE. Their responses were analysed using frequency count and percentages from which inferences were drawn. It was established that most examiners felt that the published NECO results were not the true picture of their marking experiences just as they felt that NECO published results could not compare favourably with other public examination bodies 'results. Against this background, it was recommended that NECO should be put under a monitoring governmental agency to enhance her efficiency and effectiveness to objectively and empirically assess every component of its operations that culminate into the certification of secondarians.

Introduction

Gronlund (1976) defined evaluation from the instructional objective standpoint as the process of determining the extent to which instructional objectives are achieved by pupils. It is a process of ascertaining the qualitative

and quantitative description of a programme as well as making value judgment concerning the desirability of that behaviour. Education without evaluation will lack focus, meaning and direction. Evaluation is thus the primary assignment given to examination bodies such as WAEC and NECO at the secondary level of education in Nigeria. According to Obe (1998), WAEC was established in Nigeria in 1952 and charged with the responsibility to determine and conduct the examinations required in West Africa, Nigeria inclusive. From 1952 to the mid 1970s, WAEC was the sole examining body in the Anglophone West African Countries.

Examiners' Perception of the NECO/SSCE Marking Exercise

According to Nwana (1979), examinations conducted by WAEC included the National Common Entrance, First School Leaving Certificate, School Certificate (WASCE), Higher School Certificate, London GCE, Teachers' Grade II, Royal Society of Arts, City and Guilds of the London Institute and Professional Examinations in addition to some other tests.

By 1974, WAEC had become terribly overloaded with examinations for the rapidly expanding student population. The Council's examinations were bedeviled with notorious leakages and other examination malpractices. According to the report by NECO at the 42 Annual Conference of Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN), the establishment of National Examinations Council (NECO) was necessitated by the unprecedented leakages of WAEC in 1977. The 1977 leakages led to the appointment of the Sogbetun Commission of Inquiry. The Commission recommended the establishment of other examination bodies in Nigeria to relieve WAEC of some of its heavy workload. In October 1981, WAEC admitted the need for other examination bodies to reduce its workload before the House of Representatives Committee on Education. In response, government set up the Angulu Panel in 1982 and Okoro panel in 1989. Both panels upheld the Sogbetun Panel's recommendations. In 1992, Professor Osiyale was appointed Chairman of the task force that understudied the Sogbetun and Angulu reports and made recommendations that led to the creation of the National Board for Education Measurement (NBEM) by decrees 69 and 70 of 1993. NBEM with the combined recommendations of the Etsu Nupe Panel and Vision 2010 Committee of 1997

metamorphosed into National Examination Council (NECO). The decision was upheld by March, 1999 at the National Council on Education meeting. NECO was therefore established in April, 1999 with the mandate to conduct SSCE for school based candidates while WAEC was to do the same for private candidates. To date, NECO had conducted SSCE for four years 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 respectively running parallel with the WAEC SSCE. Obe indicated that the nation experienced widespread examination malpractice and irregularities during WAEC papers every year from 1983 to 1990. It had been worse in the recent past. Obe also showed that a low percentage of students perform well scoring Distinction (A) or Credit (C) i.e. units 1-6 required for university admission. He went further to say that in almost all the subjects, candidates scoring unit 9 were more than 40% which is considered a very large failure rate. Since the establishment of NECO, there has been a debate on many issues related to candidates results. The conduct of its maiden edition of the SSCE in June/July 2000 attracted more complaints than commendation. Media reports created the impression that NECO was established to break the monopoly of WAEC in the conduct of SSCE in Nigeria. NECO's 2001 report said there were claims that Nigeria created NECO to isolate itself from its Anglo-phone sub-regional neighbours. Other allegations against NECO included the muddling up of registration of candidates and issuance of result even to candidates who were absent from the examinations.

this study include:

Procedure

In the light of the above, this study took a look at the marking exercise of NECO SSCE with the aim of ascertaining the influence of the marking process on the perceived acceptability of the result published by this examination body. The questions answered in

- i. Is the pre-marking coordination perceived by examiners to be adequate and effective to ensure consistent marking?
- ii. Do NECO officials at the marking centres possess the technical know-how to achieve success of the exercise?

- iii. Are NECO examiners perceived as efficient as expected on the job?
- iv. Do examiners perceived the general conduct of the marking exercise to be satisfactory?
- v. Do examiners perceived the candidates' performance in NECO as comparing favourably with other public examinations?
- vi. Is remuneration to examiners perceived to be motivating enough for the job?

The target population for this study is made up of all examiners involved in marking of National Examination Council (NECO) conducted Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Nigeria. This population was represented in this study by a sample of examiners randomly selected from Kwara, Osun, and Kogi States including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The sample that actually participated in the study comprised one thousand two hundred and ninety examiners. A researcher-designed questionnaire used to obtain information from the sampled examiners was pilot tested and found to have a coefficient of reliability of 0.69 using the test retest method. The questionnaire has two sections (A and B). Section A solicits for biographic data about the respondents while section B is made up of six parts that seek respondents' perception on statements using a three point rating scale of 'agree', 'disagree' and 'not sure'. The parts focused are pre-marking coordination; efficiency of NECO officers at marking centers; efficiency of the examiners, the general conduct of the marking exercise; outcome of the marking exercise and remuneration of examiners/participants in the marking exercise. The questionnaire was administered on the respondents by Research Assistants who were in close contact with the examiners at various locations to reduce cost of administration and also directly by the researcher where convenient. Of the one thousand five hundred copies of the questionnaire distributed, a percentage return of 86% was obtained.

The analysis of data collected with the questionnaire was carried out with frequency count of respondents with similar response on a particular statement and option. Percentage of respondents per statement per option was also obtained and tabulated as seen in table 1. The percentages obtained formed the basis for the inferences made about the examiners' perception of the marking exercise of NECO/SSCE.

Table1: NECO Examiners' Perception of Conduct of SSCE

	A	NS	DA
A Pre Marking Co-ordination			
1. National co-ordination of Chief Examiners is adequate and effective in giving direction to Assistant Examiners	77.3	18.2	4.6
2. Co-ordination of Assistant Examiners by Chief Examiner and Team Leader			
B Efficiency of NECO officers at marking centres			
3. There is good interpersonal relationship among NECO staff	45.5	40.9	13.6
4. There is a good understanding of responsibility among NECO staff	45.5	36.4	18.6
5. Adequate technical know-how to achieve success on the job is possessed			
6. There is a good working relation between NECO staff and examiners	50.0	18.2	31.8
C Efficiency of the Examiners			
7. The Examiners are dedicated and committed to duty and regulations	90.9	9.1	0.0
8. Examiners possess good knowledge of the subject matter in the			
9. There exists high scorer reliability and consistency among examiners	63.6	27.3	9.1
10. Examiners have respect for authority as it relates to the marking exercise	81.8	13.6	4.6
11. Examiners finish marking of scripts within allotted time	72.7	13.6	13.6
D General Conduct of the Marking Exercise			
12. The entire marking procedure is adequate	54.6	18.2	27.3
13. Mark allocation in the marking scheme is appropriate	63.6	9.1	27.3
14. Time scheduled for marking the scripts allocated to examiners			
15. There is high degree of consistency between the scoring of the Assistant Examiners and their Team leaders.	68.2	13.6	18.2
E Outcome of Marking Exercise			
16. Published grades of candidates is a true reflection of the mark/score			
17. Candidate performance in NECO can compare favourably with any other			
F Remuneration			
18. Amount paid for the marking exercise is adequate for the job done	0.0	13.6	16.4
19. Payment is done promptly to motivate Examiners for future involvement	18.2	4.6	77.3
20. There is still need for improvement	100.0	0.0	0.0

Findings

- + Most examiners perceived that adequate pre-marking coordination was always put in place. As high as 77.3% and 90.9% agreed to adequate and effective coordination exercise by chief and assistant examiners respectively.
- + There were divergent perceptions on the efficiency of NECO officials at the marking centers. While 45.5% agreed that a good relationship exists between NECO staff and the examiners, 54.5% either disagreed or were not sure.
- + Most respondents perceived that NECO officials do not have the technical know-how to make a success of the marking exercise as 72.7% were either not sure of their competence or considered that they lacked the technical know-how.
- + Respondents mostly agreed that the examiners are efficient in doing their marking 90.9% agreed that examiners are dedicated and committed to their duty; 95.5% opined that examiners have a good knowledge of the subject matter; 63.6% perceived that there is existence of a high scorer reliability and consistency; 81.8% perceived that there is existence of respect for the marking regulations.
- + The general conduct of the marking exercise was viewed to be adequate by a high percentage of the respondents as 54.6% believed that the entire-marking procedure is good, 63.6% believed that mark allocation in the marking scheme is appropriate, 68.2% agreed to consistency between assistant examiners' scoring and their team leaders.
- + The respondents' perception shifted direction when it came to the outcome of the marking exercise as 54.6% believed that the grades published by NECO do not truly reflect the scoring of examiners during the marking exercise while 54.6% also opined that candidates' performance in NECO cannot compare favourably with other public examinations.
- + Also the adequacy of the remuneration attracted a high rate of disagreement. No single respondent agreed with the amount paid while as high as 86.4% actually disagreed and 13.6% were not decisive. Also the promptness of payment cannot motivate examiners for future participation as 77.3% disagreed with the statement on the adequacy and promptness of payment! remuneration to enhance future participation.
- + All respondents (i.e. 100%) perceived that there is room for improvement.

Discussion

Pre-marking coordination of Chief and Assistant Examiners is an important prerequisite for objective, coherent and reproduceable scoring that ensures interscorer reliability. Shared understanding of the demands of the marking schemes is achieved at this point. It is also evident that if this stage is faulty, the entire marking exercise will be haphazardly accomplished. Fortunately, the result of the survey established a good and reliable foundation for NECO's marking exercise as 773% and 90% of the respondents agreed about the adequacy of coordination of the chief and assistant examiners respectively.

Examiners' Perception of the NECO/ SSCE Marking Exercise

Most of the examiners were of the view that the NECO officials are deficient in their interpersonal relationship, working relationship, and the technical know-how on the job. This is a crucial aspect of the marking exercise as the disposition of the NECO officials to the examiners and the job itself creates and dictates the working environment for the exercise. It is very important that NECO officials are aware of this situation as it could be detrimental to efficiency on their part as well as the work of the examiners and consequently mar the entire process of certification of candidates based on this examination. The high rating recorded on examiners' efficiency in performing the marking exercise is not surprising since they (the examiners) were the respondents. The degree of dedication to duty, knowledge of the subject being examined, existence of high interscorer reliability and consistency as well as respect for constituted NECO's marking authority is highly remarkable. These are necessary ingredients to ensure successful marking and dependable and reliable scoring. It could be inferred from the outcome that NECO marking exercise is endowed with able and respectable personnel such that the results of the marking exercise could be dependable. Also observed as adequate and instrumental to the success of the marking exercise is the appropriateness of scoring pattern. The allocation of marks to correct answers was viewed by the examiners as adequate. All these components are paramount to a successful marking exercise and should be encouraged.

The respondents' perception of the outcome of the marking exercise portrayed that the published NECO result is not a true reflection of the examiners' marking outcome. This calls for a lot of concern. If examiners feel that there are

discrepancies between the marks allotted to candidates based on what they found as answers in reference to what the marking scheme demands and what is published as final result, then there is reason to say doubt the authenticity of NECO's result. This has been the bone of contention of many schools of thought which believe that NECO's results are not reliable. This can also be the basis for which some schools of higher learning are not eager to accept NECO results for admission. Also established was the respondents' believe that the candidates' performance in NECO/SSCE cannot compare favorably with other public examinations. If the examiners of NECO/SSCE are of this view, then there is an alarm bell ringing, given the initial and persistent controversies that followed the establishment and operation of NECO (This day, 2000; NECO Report, 2001; Guardian, 2001; Omole, 2001; 2003). Remuneration of participants in the marking of NECO SSCE scripts was observed inadequate and observed not promptly made. This is not encouraging for the success of future examinations since the same set of examiners are employed over the years. Payment to the workers should be commensurate with the labour put into the exercise to motivate the examiners to improve on the job performance. Also the need to pay whatever is to be paid in good time is essential as the value of the naira keeps deteriorating on daily basis. There was a general believe that there is a lot of improvement to be made to enhance the marking procedure as all the respondents (100%) expressed that there is room for improvement. This should be an indication to the NECO officials that there is need for them to work harder particularly as far as the marking exercise is concerned.

Conclusion

It has been established in this study that the NECO marking exercise has a number of positive attributes that can enhance good marking outcomes. These include adequate and effective pre-marking coordination, efficient examiners who are dedicated and have good knowledge of subject matter in their marking subjects as well as appropriateness of the marking scheme and consistency of scores between the assistant examiners and the team leaders. Also established, are some negative concepts that require urgent attention if the examination body is to achieve acceptable operations. Such negative concepts includes NECO officials lacking in technical know-how; their poor interpersonal

and working relationship; inadequate remuneration of NECO examiners and most importantly the doubtful authenticity of NECO published candidates' results which is the main out put to the public of all NECO operations. It is in the light of these pros and cons perceived by the examiners as revealed in this study that the following suggestions are made to enhance the productivity and acceptability of NECO as an examination body at par with WAEC.

Recommendations

1. NECO should keep up, and if possible improve on the current standard of coordination exercise before marking proceeds to ensure good and effective marking.
2. NECO officials assigned to man the marking centres should be properly oriented to have good and stable interpersonal relationship as well as working relationship with examiners. -
3. Adequate training should be provided for NECO staff designated to the marking centres to enhance their technical know-how on their job.
4. NECO should maintain the crop of examiners and as well maintain the procedure used in selecting the present ones for future use.
5. In the light of the doubts expressed by examiners in respect of the authenticity of NECO results, the Federal Government should mandate appropriate government agencies in parallel assignment or a neutral non-governmental body to look into the marking procedure as well as postmarking exercise that lead to the published result to ascertain the state of operation and empirically authenticate the final result..
6. Improved remuneration with prompt disbursement of payment should be the watch word of the NECO officials henceforth.

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