

# The Causes and Effects of Massive WASSCE Failure in Sierra Leone

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## Abstract

Performance of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) has fallen over the years in Sierra Leone which has caused alarm in all sectors in society. The purpose of the study is to investigate the causes and effects of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone and its possible solutions, taking Senior Secondary Schools in Port Loko City as a Case study. A descriptive approach was used for the research study using self-designed questionnaire (mixed), focus group discussion and observation to collect data from the respondents. Results from findings reveals that the major cause for massive WASSCE failure was as a result of incompetency of the students, which leads to heavy cost on government nonetheless if proper monitoring is instituted by parents and the Ministry (MBSSE) the causes and effects will be lessen.

*Index terms: Anti-corruption offence, Compromise, Special room, Senior Secondary 3, WHATSAP Examination*

## INTRODUCTION

Poor West African Senior School Certificate Examination has become the order of this time. From the past years there has been fluctuation in the percentage pass rate in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results, especially with performance figures from 6% in 2019 to 4.5% in 2020 (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, 2020). These are as a result of many factors ranging from poor teaching, poor parents' guidance and monitoring, poor monitoring in the schools by school supervisors, little using of prescribed text books by teachers, incompetent teachers, lack of trained teachers in specified fields, all these has led to rampant examination malpractices that have resulted to negative effect on the government, country, parents, students, teachers, and the community at large.

Much research has been conducted on the causes of WASSCE failure in public exams but none has been researched on the effects it has on the government, country, parents, students, teachers, and the community. Hence the purpose of the research is to investigate the causes and effects of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone taking Port Loko City as a case study. The research will answer the reasons why the massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone and find solutions that will mitigate the negative effect on the various concerns of interest.

## Objective of the study

The general objective is to investigate the reasons of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone and to find possible solutions to it.

## The specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate the causes of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone
2. Determine the effects of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone

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3. Establish possible solutions that will mitigate massive WASSCE failure and its effects

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

According to Academic Credentials Evaluation Institute (ACEI-Global, 2018), West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE); is an exam that is conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) that qualifies students in the five Anglophone countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gambia) to enter universities.

To be eligible for Public University in Sierra Leone, students must have at least five WASSCE including Mathematics and English with at least unit 6 grade and better in all the five subjects.

Students having 4 credits including English language can enter for certificate and diploma programmes and students with 5 credits including Mathematics and English language (in unit 5) will enter undergraduate programmes according to (THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE, 2020).

### **The Importance of WASSCE to the Country**

The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is a very important exam taken in the country for pupils at the final stage in high school or Senior Secondary School (SSS 3). This exam enables students who succeed to enter tertiary institutions of their choice upon meeting both general and departmental requirements of the universities or higher institutions. As Sierra Leone is part of the other four Anglophone countries that takes this exam, it prepares students for the working class in the society upon graduation from these universities. And a country will want a good workforce at the end that will contribute to nation building and therefore will be glad to have students passing the WASSCE genuinely without malpractice as that is one determinant in relation to the quality of the student and the exam.

### **The Importance of WASSCE to the School**

The WASSCE is very important to the schools with senior secondary schools that takes the exam; this will tell the public how good their school is and will lead to high demand of the school by the public for their children to attend, even though some schools do have good results on the basis of examination malpractice, but for the public who are not aware of such will believe in their performance.

### **The Importance of WASSCE to the Teacher**

The teachers in the WASSCE classes teaching such pupils at the end, if they gets very good results will have the moral and will be classed as good teachers in the community and will add value to the school where they are.

### **The Importance of WASSCE to the Student**

The WASSCE is so importance to the pupils as they see themselves been in transition from high school to tertiary institution, which starts to bring hope to them and family. If they passed the exam they are assured of success and achievement in life which is just a matter of time.

### **The Importance of WASSCE to the Parents**

Parents are always happy for their children when they pass their WASSCE exam. This signals that their efforts are not in vain and their children's dreams are near fulfilment.

### **The challenges**

West African Senior School Certificate Examination over the past years in Sierra Leone, their performance has not been encouraging

### **Causes of WASSCE failure**

According to (Sesay, 2020), 2020 WASSCE 5 Subjects Pass Rate By Countries, Ghana had a pass rate of 68.5%, Nigeria 65.8%, Gambia 64.8%, and Sierra Leone 4.5% which draws the question as to why the massive failure compared to other countries that are taking the same exam?

The eight common causes for WASSCE failure are; ‘‘the improper understanding of the WASSCE, having faith in examination malpractice and special centres, procrastination, no extra study materials, cramming, not improving on weak subjects, fearing failure, too many activities, relying only on past papers, and not developing a healthy prep strategy prior to the exam’’ according to (MAUREEN, 2019). Also, ‘‘poor reading habit, poor education standards, social media, not getting the right materials, preparing with the mind set of examination malpractice, late preparation, lack of proper time management, poor approach to WAEC questions, misinformation and lack of determination to pass the examination’’ according to (Chukwuemeka, 2020). He also added poor reading habit, distractions and bad educational system are the causes of WASSCE failure. In (Staff, 2020); lack of early preparation, examination time, lack of reading the instruction carefully, dependence on friends and examination malpractice, addiction to social media, the teachers, environment, and peer influence and poor parenting are the causes of WASSCE failure.

The above causes of WASSCE failure are part of the reasons students’ fail this public exam in Sierra Leone. In addition to that are compromise promotions to next class that the students do not deserve, incompetent teachers in the WASSCE classes, teachers not completing syllabuses, teachers not using the text book materials supplied by government, and students depending on leakages, WHATSAP examinations, special rooms, and do not study any longer.

### **Effects of WASSCE failure**

The effect of WASSCE failure affects all facets in the country ranging from the government, the schools, students, teachers, parents and community.

This failure has got a negative effect on the government as huge amount of taxpayers’ money is been invested on these students and at the end of the day it is been wasted with poor results with a lot of quality issues in the countries’ educational system ( Life Learners Academy , 2020).

Even though the parents no longer pay school fees in government and government assisted schools but do spend on some school materials, pay transport and lunch in order to upkeep them. But their efforts are wasted by the series of F9 units their children brings which is equivalent to the villager who can equally have the same result if given the opportunity to take the exam, which it means no learning has taken place at all.

The dedicated and hardworking teachers’ efforts are smashed with such type of result; this discourages them as they see themselves in dilemma as to where the problem lies. But the lazy and unproductive teachers are guilty of the type of results their students receives.

The students have some psychological effect and even some leading to drugs abuse, and some death as a result of discouragement of their result outcome.

Whiles the community questions the quality of the educational system, with a lot of confusion on whom to blame, as these students who fails are in the community, some of them taking drugs, involving in bad activities like stealing, political abuse, and violence.

The schools with poor results lacks students in the subsequent years as students see the centres as not having luck with them.

### **Summary and research Gap**

From empirical review, theoretical framework, there are lot of reasons for WASSCE failure but limited or no research on the causes and effects of massive *WASSCE* exam failure in Sierra Leone of which the research aim to investigate.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This section looks into the study design, population and sample size, research instrument, data collection instruments, and analysis methods.

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### **Study design**

A descriptive approach is used for the study where a self-designed questionnaire (mixed) and observation were implemented to collect data from the respondents. This approach was used as detailed information will be attained and economical.

### **Population**

The population involves five senior secondary schools in the city of Port Loko that has an estimated 750 WASSCE candidates and teachers of this class for the period under the study.

### **Sample size**

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the 100 sample which included both students and teachers from the five senior secondary schools that sat to the WASSCE examination 20 per each school.

### **Instruments**

The research instruments used for the study are questionnaires, focused group discussion and observations.

#### **Questionnaires**

A self-designed questionnaire was administered to all the 100 respondents to get detailed information which was divided in to four (4) sections. Section A: talked about the demographic information; Section B: looked in to the question as to what causes the massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone; Section C: looked in to the question as to what are the effects of massive WASSCE failure and finally Section D: focused on what are the possible solutions that will mitigate the massive WASSCE failure and lessens the effects.

#### **Focus group discussion**

Focus group discussion was again used in order to get detailed information that the questionnaire was not able to capture.

#### **Observation**

Observation was employed in the study to gain more insight into issues that were so sensitive to corruption crimes which neither the teachers nor students will not reveal in the study but will be captured through observation method.

### **Data collection**

Both structured and unstructured questionnaires were used for data collection. Section A. The Biographic data uses structured questionnaire and Section B, C, and D uses unstructured type in order to achieve the objective of the study. The self-designed questionnaire uses section A: To collect the biographic data which are: Gender, age, ethnicity, education, occupation, and marital status, number of times sat to the WASSCE exam, and number of passes including Mathematics or English. Section B: focused on the question as to what causes the massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone to which respondents will give different answers; Section C: concentrated on the question as to what are the effects of massive WASSCE failure and finally Section D: looked on what are the possible solutions that will mitigate the massive WASSCE failure and lessens the effects. All of section B, C, and D will use unstructured questionnaire.

Focus group discussion and observation were used to collect detailed information that was not captured in the questionnaire. Again more sensitive information that will lead to Anti-Corruption offence were not revealed in the focus group but was sensed in the observation.

### Data Analysis Method

All data gathered were categorised, coded and quantified. SPSS (16.0) package was used to run the data where frequency graphs were presented for analysis using descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS

### Introduction

One hundred questionnaires were administered to the five schools twenty (20) each which was all answered and collected from the respondents. The analysis is in four (4) sections: the biographic data; the causes of massive WASSCE failure; the effects of massive WASSCE failure and the possible solutions.

**Table1: Gender of respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	45	45.0	45.0	45.0
Female	55	55.0	55.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From table 1 above, it reveals that 45% of the respondents were male and 55% female which shows that more female part took in the research than male as a result of some of the schools do not offer sciences and more of Art and Commercial students part took in the research that are dominated by female.

**Table 2: Age of the respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 16-20	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
21-25	30	30.0	30.0	70.0
26-30	20	20.0	20.0	90.0
31 and above	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From table 2 above, 40% of the respondents fall within the age brackets of 16-20 years, 30% between the ages of 21-25 years, 20% between the ages of 26-30 years, and 10% between 31 years and above. This shows that most of the respondents are in the age bracket of 16-20 years of age who are mostly within WASSCE classes and are ready to take such exam if they do not fail along the line at all.

**Table 3: Ethnicity of respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Mende	5	5.0	5.0	5.0
Themne	85	85.0	85.0	90.0
Limba	5	5.0	5.0	95.0
Others	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 above reveals the ethnicity of the respondents in the study and revealed that, 5% where Mende, 85% of Themne, 5% of Limba, and 5% are others, which shows that more Themne part took in the study because the district is Themne dominated district in the country.

**Table 4: Education of the respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Senior Secondary 3	80	80.0	80.0	80.0
Higher Teachers Certificate (HTC)	10	10.0	10.0	90.0
Bachelors degree	8	8.0	8.0	98.0
Masters degrees	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 above shows the educational background of the respondents and reveals that 80% of the respondents are at Senior Secondary 3 level, 10% having Higher Teachers Certificates (HTC), 8% are with Bachelors degree, and 2 % with Masters degree. More of the Senior Secondary 3 participated in the study. This is concluded that majority of the respondents who were part of the study are students in the WASSCE class.

**Table5: Respondents Occupation**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Student	80	80.0	80.0	80.0
Teacher	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From table 5 above, the occupation of the respondents who part took in the study reveals that 80% of the respondents were students and 20% teachers. From the occupation result, it reveals that more are students. This is as a result the research focuses at schools and students are of higher population in the schools who you do not expect to be in the working class.

**Table 6: Marital Status of the respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Married	5	5.0	5.0	5.0
Unmarried	95	95.0	95.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From table 6 above, the marital status of the respondent reveals that 5% were married and 95% unmarried. This result shows that, more of the respondents were unmarried because the research focuses more on students whom you cannot expect them to be married couples.

**Table 7: Number of times respondents have sat to the WASSCE**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid One time	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
Two times	30	30.0	30.0	80.0
More than two times	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From table 7 above, the number of times respondents have sat to the WASSCE reveals that 50% has sat to the WASSCE one time, 30% has sat to it two times, and 20% has sat to it more than two times. This reveals that the respondents who have sat to the WASSCE one time participated more in the study. This is as a result most have sat to either the private WASSCE or government WASSCE and are coming to make the second attempt to complete their subjects and were willing to participate and share their experience in order to correct the issues.

**Table 8: Number of passes including Mathematics or English**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Two passes including Mathematics or English	30	30.0	30.0	30.0
Three passes including Mathematics or English	15	15.0	15.0	45.0
Four passes including Mathematics or English	20	20.0	20.0	65.0
Five passes including Mathematics or English	10	10.0	10.0	75.0
No Pass at all	25	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 above reveals respondents who have attempted WASSCE and passed Mathematics or English language. From the table it revealed that 30% of the respondents who has sat to the WASSCE and had two passes including Mathematics or English language, 15% had three passes including Mathematics or English language, 20% had four passes including Mathematics or English language, 10% had five passes including Mathematics or English and language and 25% had no pass at all. The show more of those that responded to the study were those with two passes including Mathematics or English language. This is as a result students in their first attempts normally pass two subjects because of the bias concentration of their study to subjects that are easier to study and understand and may pay more attention to Mathematics and English as they been core requirements to enter University.

**Table 9: Causes of Massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Lack of learning atmosphere and materials(e.g. laboratory)	5	5.0	5.0	5.0
Incompetent student	35	35.0	35.0	40.0
Lack of effective monitoring by parents and ministry (MBSSE)	20	20.0	20.0	60.0
Poor teaching, do not complete syllabus, and depends on exam malpractice	30	30.0	30.0	90.0
Need specialised teachers in the sciences	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 above reveals respondents responses to the causes of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone. The results revealed that 5% were as a result of learning atmosphere and materials (e.g. laboratory), 35% because of incompetent students, 20% as a result of lack of effective monitoring by parents and the ministry (MBSSE), 30% result to poor teaching, do not complete syllabus, and depends on exam malpractices and finally 10% on lack of specialised teachers in the sciences. From the table, the respondents agreed that more of incompetent students are the cause of massive WASSCE failure. Reason been they are the students who are promoted based on compromise, bribe teachers, buy grades, highly on social media, engages on social activities, peer group influences, do not study, and do not always attend school.

**Table 10: The Effect of Massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid High dropout rate, poor human capacity, poverty, high unemployment, and crimes	31	31.0	31.0	31.0
Early marriage, teenage pregnancy, aborted dreams, frustration, madness and even killing oneself	24	24.0	24.0	55.0
Heavy cost on the government	35	35.0	35.0	90.0
Cost the parents	8	8.0	8.0	98.0
School losses value	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 above reveals from the respondents responses to the effects of massive WASSCE failure in Sierra Leone are, 31% will be high dropout rate, poor human capacity, poverty, high unemployment and crimes, 24% will result to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, aborted dreams, frustration, madness, and even kill oneself, 35% will result heavy cost on government, 8% will be cost on the parents and 2% will be school value loss. From the result more effect is on the government, reason been government pay fees for the students, buys learning materials that are not effectively used by the teachers and students, and again trying to combat high unemployment and crime rate in the societies of these high dropout students.

**Table 11: The possible solutions to mitigate massive WASSCE failure and its effects**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Proper monitoring by parents and ministry(MBSSE)	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
Students to work hard	31	31.0	31.0	71.0
Employ more trained and qualified teachers especially in the sciences	19	19.0	19.0	90.0
More Laboratory learning materials	6	6.0	6.0	96.0
West African Examination Council (WAEC) should be restructured and monitored	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 above reveals respondents views on possible solutions to mitigate the massive WASSCE failure and its effects in Sierra Leone. From the table, the result shows that 40% of proper monitoring by parents and Ministry (MBSSE) is required, 31 % of student hard work will mitigate massive failure and its effects, 19 % of trained and qualified teachers been employed and especially science teachers will help combat that, 6% said more learning materials especially laboratory materials and lastly 4% said West African Examination Council should be restructured and monitored highly. In response to finding the solutions, proper monitoring by parents and ministry appears the most with 40% in mitigating the massive WASSCE failure and its effects. This is as a results in the home the parents are to monitor their children as to what was thought in school, check on them in school, check their social activities at home, the peer group they join, check their homework and study periods at home, guide them and even motivate them to study more and discourage bribe and compromise. Whilst the ministry (MBSSE) monitors the schools, teachers, their teaching methodology, whether government teaching and learning materials are used as prescribed, employs more teachers and especially science teachers, be effective in implementing policies, pay subsidies on time so that part-time teachers will be paid, check whether administrators are repairing their schools in order to create conducive learning environment.

## CONCLUSION

The study is done in the northern part of the country in Port Loko City, Port Loko district and the result is a full representation of the study, reason been all-over the country student take the WASSCE exam and are generally affected with the same issues. From the study it was revealed that incompetent students are the causes of massive failure even though there were other causes but this is the more cause as the students do not take their school work seriously, engages always on social media, social activities and little on study. again the study revealed that the most effects from the massive failure is on the government as it pays school fees, buy learning materials, caters for the unemployed, fight crime rate from the high dropout students. In order to solve the above

issues effective monitoring by parents and ministry were given as their views for reducing massive WASSCE failure rate and its effects. These points in this research when taking in to consideration will lessen the massive WASSCE failure rate and its effects in Sierra Leone.

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