

SENIOR SECONDARY CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (SSCE) A PREDICTOR  
OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF  
ABIA STATE UNIVERSITY, UTURU, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract



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The study investigated the relationship between students' performance at Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE), level and their performance in the University. Two objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study employed an ex-post facto research design. This design was appropriate because it has already occurred without the interference of the investigator. The target population of this study was 9,028 of 200 level students in Abia State University, Uturu. The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane formula and 383 students from the 200 level students were randomly selected from the Institution under the study for the 2021/2022 - 2022/2023 academic sessions. Random sampling technique was used for this study. The research instrument for this study was the students' entry qualification and academic achievement (CGPA grades for 2021/2022 – 2022/2023 academic sessions) collected from examination and records office of the Institution. The grades of the SSCE results were collected from the original computer sheet as provided by the Examinations and records unit of the University. Simple linear regression statistics was used to analyze the data collected. Result of the findings revealed that senior secondary school students' certificate examination does not significantly predict their university grades between 2021/2022-2022/2023 academic sessions. Recommendations were made among others that University management should continue to give post UTME test to candidates before offering provisional admission to ensure the entry requirement measure with the future academic achievement.

**Keywords:** SSCE, University grades, Academic Achievement.

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## Introduction

University education in Nigeria is one of the paramount academic platforms that many seek to reach. Despite the increasing number of universities in Nigeria, there is an even greater increase in the number of applicants to the universities each year (Isikeh, 2019). This plethora of available candidates makes the selection of quality candidates into institutions quite tedious. This is sadly accompanied by an observed poor performance of university students (Adeosun, 2017; Oshodi *et al.*, 2018). As a result of this, several schemes have been put in place to manage the plethora of applicants to these universities while attempting to maintain the selection of quality students, who will perform well in the university. So, there is an observable shift in the way students are being admitted into universities; from the immediate post-colonial era when universities were left to set their own admission standards under the National Universities Commission (NUC) to the formation of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

However, the need to train and produce adequate high-level skilled manpower that can drive social, political and economic change in Nigeria depends largely on the quality of university education. Therefore, university education in Nigeria was structured with the view to develop peoples' intellectual abilities, sharpen their cultural attributes, and acquire knowledge and skills for career opportunities and national development. To realize these goals and sustain higher education integrity, National University Commission (NUC), (an agency enacted by Decree No. 1 of 1974 with statutory role of advising Federal Government of Nigeria on higher education) was established. However, the high rate of unemployment in the country, which according to National Bureau of Statistics (2018) stood at 23.1%, is adjudged to be partly due to the failure of the NUC to achieve its objectives (Bichi, 2015).

Consequently, incompetent and unemployable graduates are produced by universities, which are precipitated by the admission process that failed to control the quality of candidates seeking admission to universities (Longe, 2017). Owing to this, post-secondary school examination bodies in the country like Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) have been heavily criticized by the public and education stakeholders on admission process integrity (Uhunmwangho & Ogunbadeni, 2014). It was the result of such criticism that made NUC introduces the Post-Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (Post-UTME) in 2005 for university admission process and ensuring that competent candidates were admitted into Nigerian Universities and also predicting future academic performance in universities. Since the introduction of the Post-UTME, which is a test conducted by individual Universities in Nigeria, significant success has been recorded in terms of increase in students' academic performance and improving quality of education by reducing attrition rate due to poor academic performance in the previous years (Ogunniran, Longlong, & Adu, 2019; Oludayo, 2018). Besides, in spite of students' successfully passing Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and scoring above the required average marks (in some cases 200 marks out of 400) in UTME, the situation is still worrisome. These students go through

the rigorous admission process of universities known as Post-UTME screening. Those admitted in universities to pursue various courses of interest rejoice, but a few students still find it challenging to successfully scale through their course of study and this results in increased rate of failures and dropouts. This phenomenon has raised a lot of concerns and debates in the public, majorly because of yearly increase in dropout rate resulting from academic failure. The question is that after passing through rigorous admission procedure, why then many candidates still find it difficult to achieve their educational goals. For instance, the senate of the University of Ibadan approved the withdrawal of 408 students from the university in 2015/2016 session owing to the failure to meet the minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) requirements to stay in the university (Oludayo, 2018). This becomes worrisome to the educational stakeholders.

Similarly, in 2016/2017 session, 328 students were also advised to withdraw from the university in their first year. Such a scenario of students' elimination from the universities apparently makes a negative impact not only on the individual candidates and their parents but also on the nation's economic hardship. This might cause extreme consequences including antisocial behaviors ranging from examination malpractices, street hawking, early marriage, gang starling, corruption, political thuggery, kidnapping and terrorism (Longe, 2017). Due to such apprehensions and the ugly situation, the current study was designed. The researcher aimed to investigate the predicting factors of SSCE and NECO on the University performance of students.

In Nigeria, the admission of prospective students into universities is placed in the hands of an examining body which is the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) which carries out aptitude testing on the candidates' proposed area of learning. Entry into any school is guided by standard requirements and guidelines which have been put in place to select the best materials for nation-building. Olajide, Okewole, and Agboola (2015) stated that there are three categories of students being admitted to university undergraduate programs in Nigeria. They include those that passed through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination or through direct entry (DE) admission and those who passed through a remedial program being run by an individual university respectively. All three groups have varying academic experiences and hence the basis for differences in their modes of entry into university.

On the other hand, entry qualification is a prerequisite for gaining admission into higher institutions and universities globally. Entry qualification for admission of candidates into Nigerian Universities is based on the overall grading system by public examination bodies. These bodies include West African Examination Council (WAEC), Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) National Examination Council (NECO) and National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB). They are part of the educational system in Nigeria meant to conduct examinations and award certificates to successful candidates for secondary schools and out-of-school candidates. These examining bodies are established to ensure validity of examinations among other factors for national interest in

achieving national goals and aspirations. A cut off mark score in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) is part of the entry qualification. The overall grading by these public examination bodies include: A1, B2 and B3 for distinction, C4, C5 and C6 for credit grade, D7 and D8 for ordinary pass while F9 for the failure grade. A candidate having up to 5 distinctions or 5 combination of distinctions and credit or at least credit in five subjects including Mathematics and English Language with some passes in public examinations and a cutoff mark score in UTME is qualified for admission into tertiary institution(Biman *et al*, 2019).

In addition, Umar *et al*, (2021) pointed out that, the SSCE certificate from the West African Examination Council (WAEC), or its equivalent from the National Examination Council (NECO), the WAEC Ordinary Level General Certificate of Education (O' level GCE), or the one from the National Board for Technical Education (NABTEB), are the accepted entry requirements to any tertiary education in the country. A student who was able to obtain at least credit passes in at least five subjects (which includes English Language and Mathematics, and 3 other subjects as relevant to one's field of interest) is not more than two sittings is deemed to have the aptitude to cope with the demands of tertiary education.

Consequently, academic achievement is a measure of knowledge gained in formal education usually indicated by test scores, grades, grade point average and degrees (Lawrence & Vimala, 2012). Academic achievement in university setting is being assessed through the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of students in all the courses registered. Students are considered to have performed well if the CGPA is high. The grade point average is on cumulative basis from 100 level (part one) to 500 level (part five). The CGPA would determine the performance level of the student from one semester to another. The classification of CGPA is such that 4.50 and above is First Class, 3.50-4.49 is second class upper division, 2.40-3.49 is second class lower division, 1.5 – 2.39 is third class, 1.00-1.49 is pass degree while below 1.00 fail.

In a similar way, academic achievement is a measure of students' activities through examination within the context of a curriculum. That is, how an individual is able to demonstrate his or her intellectual abilities often observed through the individual's score in an examination. Hence, academic achievement refers to a measure of how well students have performed in the various assessment items set before them based on some criteria determined by professional educators. In assessing the academic achievement of students, a number of factors have been investigated which include university data such as semester GPA (Ahmad *et al*, 2015), socio-economic status (Mohamed & Waguhi, 2017), student environment (Mueen *et al* 2016) among others. According to Cambridge University research, academic achievement is frequently measured in terms of exam results. It is frequently defined by a student's performance on tests, course assignments, and examinations. As an indicator or performance measure of academic achievement, academic performance reveals itself in the class of degree acquired. Academic performance is defined by Chigozie (2019) in three ways: the ability to study and remember facts, that is, the ability to study effectively and see how

facts fit together to form a larger pattern of knowledge, the ability to think for yourself in relation to facts, and the ability to communicate your knowledge verbally or on paper.

Umar, Taminu and Aminu, (2021) researched on entry qualification as predictor of students' academic achievement in Geography in Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria and found that there is significant different between entry qualification and students' academic achievement in Geography. The researchers recommended among others that, factors like age, working experience in admission exercise as well as inefficiencies, and examination malpractice should be address during the UTME examination

On the other hand, Aminu *et al* (2022) investigated the relationship between students' entry qualifications and academic performance in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria, found in the study that, there was no significant relationship between entry qualifications (WAEC, NECO, NABTEB) and students' academic performance in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto. The paper recommends that; students with good WAEC, NECO, and NABTEB results should be given admission into the Colleges of Education and adequate measures should be taken by WAEC, NECO and NABTEB in order to improve the quality of the items and in the area of continuous assessment.

Adamu, Anza and Hananiy (2019) investigated the relationship between entry qualifications and students academic achievement in Gombe State tertiary Institutions, Nigeria. On the basis of findings of the study, it was concluded that students' entry qualification, students' mode of entry have significant relationship with students academic achievement in Gombe State tertiary Institutions

In the same line, Biman, John, Kawu and Fatima (2019) researched on ordinary level result and jamb entry qualifications as predictors of undergraduate biology students' academic achievement in Nigerian Universities. The findings of the study revealed that West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), National Business and Technical Certificate Examination (NBC/NTC) and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) did not predict biology student's academic achievement. It was recommended among others that WAEC, NECO, NBC/NTC and JAMB bodies should be strict in conducting their examinations to ensure that the entry grades indicate real achievement of the candidates to be admitted so that the grades can predict future achievement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) is a pre-requisite for admission into the Universities. This implies that students who did well in SSCE should equally performed better in the University examination. In addition, it has been time honored practice to use examination results as measures of learning success or failures, although SSCE examination results these days are neither the true tests of knowledge nor the best guarantee of one's ability to perform well in the University. Many criticisms have been leveled against the SSCE examination results; these include examination malpractice, wrong implementation of



continuous assessment as well as Parents negligence of duties. However, in as much as people believed that a student who performed well in SSCE examination will cope with the rigors of University education, the problem still remains that, some students, despite their excellent performance in SSCE results are not doing as expected in the university examinations. Based on the forgoing the researcher seeks to investigate whether Senior Secondary Certificate Examination could predicts the University grades.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which the Senior Secondary school students' Certificate Examination (SSCE) predicts their university grades. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent to which senior secondary school students certificate examination results predicts their university grades in 2021-2022 academic session.
2. Determine the extent to which senior secondary school students certificate examination results predicts their university grades in 2022-2023 academic session.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were answered in this study;

1. To what extent does senior secondary school students' certificate examination results predicts their university grades in 2021-2022 academic sessions?
2. To what extent to which senior secondary school students' certificate examination results does predicts their university grades in 2022-2023 academic session?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 alpha level of significant.

1. Senior secondary school students certificate examination results does not predicts their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session.
2. Senior secondary school students certificate examination results does not predicts their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session.

### **Research Method**

This study employed an ex-post facto research design. This design was appropriate because it has already occurred without the interference of the investigator. The study was conducted in Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State. The target population of this study was 9,028 level 200 students in Abia State University, Uturu. The sample size for this study determined using Taro Yamane formula was 383 level 200 students, randomly selected from the Institution under the study during the 2021/2022-2022/2023 academic sessions. Random sampling technique was used for this study. The research instrument for this study was the students'

entry qualification and academic achievement (CGPA grades for 2021/2022 – 2022/2023 academic sessions) collected from the exams and records of the Institution. The grades of the SSCE results were collected from the original computer sheet as provided by the Examinations and records unit of the University. Simple linear regression statistics was used to analyze the data collected.

### Research Question 1

To what extent does senior secondary school students' certificate examination results predicts their university grades in 2021-2022 academic sessions?

### Hypothesis 1

Senior secondary school students' certificate examination result does not predict their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session.

**Table 1: Simple Linear Regression Analysis on senior secondary school students' certificate examination results and their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Remarks
SSCE Results	0.116	0.139	13.9%	0.139	Very Low Extent of Prediction
University grades					

Variables	Sources of Variation	Sum of Square	of Df	MS	p-cal	p-crit	Decision at p<.05
SSCE Results	Regression	222.629	1	222.629			Accept H <sub>01</sub>
University grades	Residual	42.571	381	.168	.069	.05	

Not Significant at .05 alpha levels. R= .116. Source: Researcher's survey (2023)

In Table 1, the results reveal that the R-value is 0.116 and R<sup>2</sup> is 0.139. The R-value of 0.116 indicates positive and very low extent of prediction, while the R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.139 which is the coefficient of determination, show the extent of prediction on how Senior secondary school students' certificate examination results does not predicts their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session. This finding implies that 13.9% variance in university grades in

2021/2022 academic sessions predicted by senior secondary school students' certificate examination. This means that senior secondary school students' certificate examination very lowly predicts their university grades.

The results in Table 1 also show that the calculated p- value of .069 is greater than the critical p- value of .05 level of significant, with 1 and 381 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that senior secondary school students' certificate examination does not significantly predict their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session.

### Research Question 2

To what extent does senior secondary school students' certificate examination results predicts their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session?

### Hypothesis 2

Senior secondary school students' certificate examination result does not predict their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session.

**Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis on senior secondary school students' certificate examination results and their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Remarks
SSCE Results	0.131	0.157	15.7%	0.157	Very Low Extent of Prediction
University grades					

Variables	Sources of Variation	Sum of Square	of Df	MS	p-cal	p-crit	Decision at p<.05
SSCE Results	Regression	301.329	1	301.329			Accept H <sub>0</sub> 2
University grades	Residual	40.433	381	.762	.062	.05	

Not Significant at .05 alpha levels. R= .131. Source: Researcher's survey (2023)



In Table 2, the results reveal that the R-value is 0.131 and  $R^2$  is 0.157. The R-value of 0.131 indicates positive and very low extent of prediction, while the  $R^2$  value of 0.139 which is the coefficient of determination, show the extent of prediction on how Senior secondary school students' certificate examination results does not predicts their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session. This finding implies that 15.7% variance in university grades in 2022/2023 academic session is predicted by senior secondary school students' certificate examination. This means that senior secondary school students' certificate examination very lowly predicts their university grades.

The results in Table 2 also show that the calculated p- value of .062 is greater than the critical p- value of .05 level of significant, with 1 and 381 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that senior secondary school students' certificate examination significantly predicts their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session.

### Discussion of the Findings

The result in Table 1 revealed that, senior secondary school students' certificate examination does not significantly predict their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session. The result also revealed that senior secondary school students' certificate examination to a low extent predicts their university grades in 2021/2022 academic session. This finding indicated that university grades in 2021/2022 academic session do not depends on senior secondary school students' certificate examination. This finding could be attributed to the fact that SSS certificate examinations in most schools were conducted under malpractice environment where teachers give answers to students. Students also copied answers from online materials and textbooks during examinations and this hardly occurred in the university system. More so, senior secondary certificate examinations typically focus on a structured format with specific subjects, whereas university courses often require a broader set of skills with different evaluation methods. In addition, University assessments may include a variety of evaluation techniques such as essays, research projects, practical exams, and class participation, which may not be reflected in the SSS examination format. The findings collaborate with the findings of Aminu *et al* (2022) which shows that there was no positive relationship between entry qualification and academic performance. However, the findings of this study disagree with the work of Umar *et al* (2021), who revealed that there is a significant difference between entry qualification and students' academic achievement in Geography in Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.

The result in Table 2 revealed that, senior secondary school students' certificate examination does not significantly predict their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session. The result also revealed that senior secondary school students' certificate examination to a low extent predicts their university grades in 2022/2023 academic session. This finding indicated that University grades in 2022/2023 academic session do not depends on senior secondary school students' certificate examination. This finding could be attributed

to the fact that they could not measure in relation with the lecture method of teaching being adopted in the University unlike the one in the secondary level, where teaching method is used. Moreover, it could also be as a result of students' are being involved in social and extracurricular activities. However, external factors such as personal challenges, financial issues, or health problems may influence student's performance at the University level, and these factors are not considered in SSS examinations. The present findings also collaborates with the findings of (Biman,*et al* 2019) who revealed that WASSCE,SSCE and NBC results did not predict academic achievement of biology students in the University. On the other hand the present findings is contrary to the findings of Adamu *et al* (2019), who reported that students' entry qualification, students' mode of entry have significant relationship with students' academic achievement in Gombe State. .

### Conclusion

The study concludes that senior secondary school students' certificate examination does not significantly predict their university grades. Therefore, university grades of students do not depend on their senior secondary school students' certificate examination.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University management should continue to give post UTME test to candidates before offering provisional admission to them in order to ensure the entry grades measure with the future academic achievement.
2. Senior secondary school students' certificate examination bodies should improve on their examination administration approaches so as to achieve the objectives of the set examination.
3. In addition, students should develop good study habit skills and also show positive attitude toward their studies, as this will help to ameliorate academic failure.

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