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ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND IMPACT OF LINEAR DISTANCE ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF PLATEAU STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated access to education and impact of linear distance on students' academic achievement in junior secondary schools in Plateau State. The study was precipitated by inadequate access to linear distance and students' poor achievement in Mathematics and English Language BECE in Plateau State. The purpose of the study was to assess the access to education and impact of linear distance on students' achievement in BECE. Three research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The ex post facto design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 298 junior secondary schools in Plateau State with 21,434 JSS students and 1554 teachers. A sample of 116 JSS consisting of 2712 JSS students and 318 teachers were sampled using disproportionate stratified sampling technique to draw the number of students and teachers. A questionnaire was used to collect data as well as a template. Data were analysed using means and chi-square statistic. The findings of the study revealed that enrolment status of JSS students in Plateau was decreasing and a there was a decline in academic achievement in Mathematics and English language. Linear distance had significant impact on students' academic achievement. It was recommended that government at all levels should address the problem of poverty to sustain enrolment. Government and by school proprietors should do proper school mapping in siting schools to be accessible to students especially in rural areas.

Keywords: Access, Education, Linear Distance, academic Achievement

Introduction

Education satisfies a basic human need for knowledge, provides a means for helping to meet other basic needs and helps to accelerate overall development. It is in recognition of this importance that government and international community all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education. The right to education has been reaffirmed internationally (UNICEF, 2014). Access to education is generally ensuring that people have opportunity to attain its level and benefit for their life lifting opportunities, societal growth and development; this among others, justifies making education a fundamental human right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion and any peculiar individual challenge.

According to Bawa (2019), access to education simply means effecting the right to education and providing opportunity to be educated. It entails the removal of encumbrances to enrolling, remaining and successfully completing education. In Plateau State, many school age children do not have access to education in spite of the right. According to UNICEF (2018) the population of the out of school children have risen from 10.5 million to 13.2 million, of which about 750, 000 are from Plateau State. Also, it is estimated that about 40% of the children who enrolled in school do not successfully complete the circle (SUBEB, 2016). If this high number of children do not have access to education. It spells doom for educational development and inability to acquire skills and knowledge needed for individual and societal development.

Again, many children are constrained by linear distance. Linear distance is the distance school children cover from home to school. A situation where junior secondary schools are located at distance beyond the prescribed walking distance of 2.5 km (UNESCO, 2012) as the standard norm bring about stress of trekking on students. Location of some junior secondary schools in Plateau State are at variance with the concept of neighbourhood schools and seems to violate the maximum walking distance prescribed by UNESCO. The distance covered to school principates fatigue, waned interest, breeds absenteeism (Obioke & Onwuka in Bawa 2023). In fact, when students travel beyond the distance norm to school on feet, they may be weighed down by the stress and may not have enough energy to participate in school activities and can develop school phobia and get discouraged from attending school. This can undermine retention and quality of school. Furthermore, when students are always preoccupied with the thought of stress to trek back home from school, it may reduce their concentration and assimilation in academic work and achievement. This fatigue may negate access, retention, completion and students' achievement in junior secondary schools in Plateau State.

The socio-economic status of parents is another factor which may affect access, retention, completion and academic achievement of junior secondary school students in Plateau State. It has been discovered that parents with low level of education either for reason of poverty or ignorance place low premium on the education of their children and are therefore unwilling to appreciate the need for support to their children to pursue education (Bawa, 2023). A situation whereby children are seen hawking, pushing wheel barrows or human porterage in motor parks during school hours to supplement family income is not encouraging. Parents who are unable to meet up with the rising cost of education in terms of user charges, institutional cost, cost of personal upkeep and opportunity cost borne by the households may withdraw them along the way. Education is not a cost-free venture and it requires substantial amount to enrol

a child in school where the parent's income is low, they may not afford the cost of enrolling, retaining to completion and obtaining a good result.

A situation where there is a high number of children who do not have access to education due to poor attendance, absenteeism, limited access and linear distance, if left unchecked will have negative implications not only for students but also for family, community and the nation at large, evident on unemployment, low income earning capacity, and loss of human development. It is in the light of the above mentioned that the paper sets to assess access to education and impact of linear distance on academic achievement in Junior Secondary School of Plateau State.

Access to basic education have been low. According to the UNICEF, about 13.2 million children of school age do not have access to western type of education in Nigeria. Out of this, 750,000 are from Plateau State. Also, the analysis of data collected on Basic Education Certificate Examination results from 2016 to 2019 for Plateau State revealed that the achievement rate is poor. If this situation is left unchecked, the consequences such as low ability to acquire, skills, and knowledge needed for human capital development as well as low ability to acquire skills and knowledge needed for human capital development as well as individual and societal development among others are inevitable. Government efforts to stem the tide include education committee at the community level, sensitization programmes, economic empowerment and award of scholarships seems not to have yielded the desired results aimed at improving access at basic education as well as establishment of more Junior Secondary Schools in rural access all to improve access and linear distance.

The provision of educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels inside and outside the formal system is the objective of the National Policy on Education (Moti, cited in Bawa, 2023). The philosophy of national policy on Education is in consonance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which asserts that everyone has a right to education (Child Rights Act, 2023). UNESCO (2008) defines access to education as ensuring that people have access to various levels of educational institutions, that is making it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to receive it. This also means making available equal educational opportunities for those who are qualified to receive it irrespective of gender, age, sex, status or any other factor. This is in agreement with Nigeria's philosophy of education which states that education is compulsory and the right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background or any individual with peculiar challenges (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013).

According to Bulus (2015), Access and retention of students in junior secondary schools in Plateau State revealed that many of the students do not enrol for education. The researchers identify child labor, poverty, difficult terrain, urban rural dichotomy, lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, broken home, engagement of children for domestic services in cities as factors preventing children's access to education. Academic achievement refers to the degree of a student accomplishment and success retain in his or her studies (Bawa, 2023). The most well-known indicator of measuring academic achievement is grades which reflect the student's scores for their subjects and overall tenure. The increasing fall in the quality of manpower and the negative implications of this on the posterity of Nigeria is making academic achievement a concern (Unanma, Abugu, Dike & Umeobita, 2013).

Also, Alimi, Ehinola and Alibi (2012) opine that Junior secondary school is pivotal in human capital formation and development. Lawrence (2014) observed that about 93% of Junior secondary students three (JSS3) in any given year do not pass well to enter senior secondary school one (SSS1). Olorundare (2013) observed a below average achievement of thousands of students in BECE and that only 20% of the candidate passed at acceptable credit level. Asides the failure rate, the complaints also showed that JSS students are not meeting the expected end of producing quality students to SS1 level. Linear distance simply means a distance from home to school. UNESCO (2012) recommends a walking distance of 2.5km as the standard norm. Any location of a school where a student treks distance beyond this prescribed walking distance violates the maximum walking distance allowed by UNESCO. In the view of Mathew (2015), trekking long distance by students reduce assimilation levels of students and consequently affects their achievement. While some scholars maintain that linear distance is not a factor for achievement (Adebule & Aborisade, 2013), others like Okorie and Ezeh (2016) asserted that long distance trekking saps students' energy, makes them to arrive school late and do not have enough energy to participate in school activities after being punished for late coming.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to assess the access to education and impact of linear distance on the academic achievement in Mathematics and English Language at of JSS students in Plateau State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to;

1. ascertain students' enrolment status in Junior Secondary Schools in Plateau State between 2020 to 2024
2. appraise the academic achievement in Mathematics and English Language at Junior Secondary School Students in Basic Education Certificate Examination in Plateau State from 2020 to 2024
3. establish the extent to which linear distance impact on academic achievement in Junior Secondary Schools in Plateau State.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been raised to guide the study;

1. What is the enrolment status of Junior Secondary School Students in Plateau State from 2019 to 2024?
2. What is the achievement profile of Students in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in Mathematics and English language from 2019 to 2024?
3. To what extent does linear distance impact on students' academic achievement levels of Junior Secondary School Students in Plateau State.?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no significant difference in the level of student's enrolment and linear distance of Junior Secondary School in Plateau State.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of students' academic achievement and linear distance of Junior Secondary School in Plateau State.

Methodology

The study adopted the ex post facto design, the choice of ex post facto design was because it was not possible or practicable to manipulate any variable as the cause-and-effect phenomenon of the study had occurred (Panneerselvam, 2012) The population consisted of 298 Junior secondary schools in 17 Local Government Areas of Plateau state. It comprised 21434 students according to the Plateau State Universal Basic Education Board (2018). A sample size of 116 JSS, Junior Secondary Schools consisting of 2712 students in the Local Government Areas was determined using Yamane (1967) formula was selected. Disproportionate stratified sampling technique was used to draw the numbers of students and teachers. Questionnaire and template were used to collect data. The face-to-face method was adopted in administering the questionnaire as well as obtaining information using the template from the school registers (Documents). The template was validated by experts for content and reliability test was carried which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83 which established the instruments were highly reliable. Percentage and mean score were used to answer research questions and chi-square statistics was used to answer the hypotheses.

Results

Research Question One

What is the enrolment status of Junior Secondary Schools students in Plateau State from 2020 to 2024?

Table 1

General Enrolment in the JSS in Nine LGAs of Plateau state

Year	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total
2020	6360	55	5130	45	11490
2021	5361	51	5216	49	10577
2022	5629	56	4471	44	10100
2023	7555	54	6355	46	13910
2024	5385	55	4468	45	9853
Total	30290		25610		55930

Source Plateau State SUBEC (2024)

Table 1 shows the general enrolment status in junior secondary schools in Plateau State. In 2020, the enrolment was 11490 having 55% males and 45% females. In 2021, the enrolment was 10577 having which were made up of 51% males and 49% female. Again in 2022, the enrolment was 10100 having 56% males and 44% females. In 2023, the enrolment was 13910 having 54% males and 46% females. In 2024 the enrolment was 9853 students having 55% males and 45% females. Generally, the highest enrolment was in 2019 with 13910 having 25% followed by 2020 with 21% then 2021, the least enrolment was in 2020 with 9853 students having 18% of the total population.

Research Question Two

What is the achievement profile of students in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in Mathematics and English Language, Plateau State from 2020 to 2024.

Profile of Student's Academic Achievement in Mathematics BECE from 2020-2024

Year	**Grades**			
	A (Distinction)	**C (Credit)**	**P (Pass)**	**F(Fail)**

2020	9.3%	16.6%	29.5%	44.6%
2021	8%	18.6%	28.3%	45%
2022	8%	18.6%	28.3%	45%
2023	16.7%	18.2%	40.3%	45%
2024	16.7%	17.9%	35.2%	30.1%

Source Plateau State SUBEC (2024)

Table 2 shows the Mathematics BECE results from 2020-2024. The result of the year 2020 revealed that 801 candidates out of 2712 candidates that sat for the BECE had grade 'P' and this is represented by 29.5% as shown on the table. 1209 candidates failed and the percentage of failure is 44.6%. Also, the result revealed that 451 candidates had grade 'C' and this is depicted by the table with 16.6%. More so only 9.3% of them had grade 'A'. In other words, only 25.9% of the candidates had excellence. It can be deduced from analysis that only 702 candidates out of 2712 passed with either grade 'C' or grade 'A'. The implication is that in 2020 only 25.9% of them passed Mathematics and 74.1% failed. The result of Mathematics in 2021 revealed that 45% of the candidate had grade 'F' and 769 candidates' or 28.3% of these that sat for the examination had grade 'P'. The result also showed that 18.6% or 505 candidates had grade 'C'. While only 8% or 216 of the candidate had grade 'A'. Based on the analysis only 26.6% the candidates passed and 73.4% failed Mathematics in 2021. Two thousand seven hundred and twelve candidates sat for the BECE in 2022 and the result revealed that 1222 candidates had grade 'F' or 45% failed Mathematics 769 candidates had grade 'P' and this is represented by 28.3%, 505 candidates had grade 'C' as depicted by 18.6%. Indeed, 216 candidates or 8.0% had grade 'A'. It can also be deduced from the analysis that in 2022, only 26.6% candidates passed with either Or grade 'A' and this comprised of candidates out of 2712 candidates that sat for the examination. There were 2712 candidates that sat for the BECE in 2023. The results revealed that 674 candidates failed or had grade 'F' in order words 24.8% failed 1092 candidates passed Mathematics with grade 'P' and this represented 40.3% while 494 candidates had grade 'C' as depicted by 18.2% The results revealed that 452 candidates or 16.7% of the candidates have grade 'A' in Mathematics. It can be inferred from the analysis that 34.9 % or 946 out of 2712 candidates passed mathematics with either grade 'C' or grade 'A'

The year 2024 showed that 2712 sat for BECE and the result revealed 817 candidates, had grade 'F' the BECE and the result revealed that 817 candidates had 'F' or 30.1% failed Mathematics, 955 candidates had grade 'P' and this is represented by 35.2% while 486 candidates had grade 'C' as depicted by 17.9% 452 candidates or 16.7% had grade 'A' it can be deducted from the analysis that 940 candidates passed Mathematics with either grade 'C' or 'A' in 2024. In order words only 34.6% passed Mathematics and 64.5% failed. The comparative analysis of the mathematics results from 2020 to 2024 showed that in 2020 only 25.9% of the candidates passed and 74.1% Failed. In 2021, 26.6% of the candidates passed Mathematics and 73.4% failed while in 2022, 26.6% of the candidates passed and 73.4% failed Mathematics. In 2023 34.9% of the candidates passed Mathematics and 65.1% failed while in 2024 34.6% of the candidates passed and 65.4% failed it can be deduced from the comparative analysis that the students performed worst in mathematics in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2024.

Table 3

Profile of students' Academic Achievement in English Language BECE from 2020-2024

Year	A (Distinction)	C (Credit)	P (Pass)	F (Fail)
2020	12.1%	15.6%	27.7%	44.6%
2021	11.4%	14.7%	44.7%	29.1%
2022	11.1%	23.1%	25.1%	40.6%
2023	14.4%	16.3%	25.6%	43.8%
2024	14.3%	16.4%	42.3%	27.1%

Source; *Plateau State SUBEB, (2024)*

The result of the year 2020 revealed that 752 candidates out of 2715 candidates that sat for the examination had grade P and this is represented by 27.7% as shown by the table. 1010 failed and the percentage of failure is 44.6%. Also, the results revealed that 422 candidates had grade 'C' and this is represented by 15.6% Moreso only 12.1%of them had grade 'A' In order words, only 328% of the candidates had excellence. it can be deduced from the analysis that only 750% candidates out of 2712 passed with either grade 'C' or grade 'A' and the rate of those that passed English was 27.7% while 72.3% failed. English result in 2021 revealed that 790 or 29.1% of the candidates had grade f and 1212 candidates or 44.7%. Also results revealed that 422 candidates had grade 'C' and this is represented by 15.6% Moreso, only 12.1% of them had grade A. in other words only 328 of the candidates had excellence. It can be deduced from the analysis that only 750 candidates out of 2712 passed with either grade 'C' or grades A and the rate of those that passed English was 27.7% while 72.3% failed. English results in 2021 revealed that 790 or 21.1% of the candidates got grade 'F' and 1212 candidates or 44.7% of those that sat for examination had grade 'P'. The result also showed that 14.4% or 400 candidates had grade 'A'. Based on the analysis, only 26.1% candidates passed English and 73.9% failed.

The year 2022 showed that 2712 candidates sat for BECE and the result revealed that 1102 candidates had grade F or 40.6% failed English. 682 candidates had grade 'P' and this represented by 25.1% while 626 candidates had grade 'C' as depicted by 23.1%. 302 candidates or 11.1% had grade 'A'. It can also be deduced from the analysis that in 2022, only 34.2% candidates passed with either grade 'C' or grade 'A' and this comprised of 928 candidates. The result were 2712 that sat for the BECE in 2023. The result revealed that 1187 candidates had grade 'F'. In other words, 43.8% failed English, 694 candidates passed English with grade 'P' and this is represented by 25.6% while 441 candidates had grade 'C' as depicted by 16.3%. The result of the finding revealed that 390 candidates or 14.4% of the candidates had grade 'A' in English. It is vital to note that from the analysis so far 30.7% or 831 out of 2712 candidates passed English with either grade 'C' or grade 'A'.

Furthermore, in 2024, 2712 sat for BECE and the result revealed that 734 candidates had grade 'F' or 27.1% failed English. 1119 candidates had grade 'P' and was rated 42.3% while 444 candidates had grade 'C' as depicted by 16.4%. 387 candidates had grade 'A' and the reate was 14.3%. It can be deduced from the analysis that 831 candidates passed English with either grade 'C' or grade 'A' in 2024. In other words, only 30.7% passed English and 69.3% failed. The comparative analysis of the English results from 2020 to 2024 showed that only 27.7% of the candidates passed English and 72.3% failed in 2020. In 2021, 26.1% of the candidates passed English and 73.9% failed while in 2022, 34.2% of the candidates passed and 65.8% failed. In 2023, 30.7% of the candidates passed English and 69.3% failed. While in

2024, 30.7% of the candidates passed English and 69.3% failed. It can be deduced from the comparative analysis that the students performed worse in English in 2020 and 2024.

Research Question Three

To what extent does linear distance impact on the academic achievement levels of junior secondary school students in Plateau state?

Table 4

Impact of Linear Distance on the Academic Achievement of student

		Achievement			**Total**
	F	**P**	**C**	**A**	
Linear Distance Far Count	0	824	498	413	1735
% Within Linear	0.0%	47.5%	28.7%	23.8%	100.0%
% Within Achievement	0.0%	72.2%	100.0%	100%	64.0%
Near Count	0	0	659	318	977
% Within Linear	0.0%	0.0%	67.5%	32.5%	100%
% Within Achievement	0.0%	36.2%	27.8%	36.0%	100%

Key : F=Fail P=Pass C=Credit A=Distinction

Table 4 shows the impact of linear distance on the achievement of students in both Mathematics and English. 824 out of the 1735 students who are far from the school got 'P, 498 of them got 'C' while 413students got 'A' also, 659 students out of the 977 students who are near school got 'C'; while 318 of them got 'C' indicating that linear distance to school has impact on students' achievement since students who stay near the school performed better than students who stay far from the schools in all the two subjects.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the level of student's enrolment and linear distance in junior secondary schools in Plateau state.

Table 5

Chi-square Result of Enrolment on Linear Distance

	Value	**Df**	**Asymptotic significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square	10.0009	4	350
Likelihood Ratio	13.863	4	127
Linear by linea Association	846	1	358
Number of Valid Cases	55930		

Table 5 revealed the chi-square result on whether or not enrolment of students is dependent on linear distance. From the result $X^2(1,4) = 10.000$, $P>0.05$, since the P-value of 0.358 is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was retained and we accepted that student's enrolment is not dependent on linear distance.

Discussion

The finding on enrolment status of JSS students in Plateau state from 2020 to 2024 showed that the enrolment was low. This confirmed the view of Bulus (2015) who found that low enrolment of student has been on the increase. This is attributed to high rate of poverty in most homes. In respect of the academic achievement of students BECE in Plateau state, from

2020 to 2024. Findings revealed a general decline in achievement levels in mathematics and English Language. This low achievement confirmed the findings of Olorundare (2013) where he pointed out that, there has been a repeated below achievement level of thousands of students writing BECE annually: He further stated that only 20% or slightly or below it of the candidates passed at an acceptable credit and distinction level. This has the implication for poor human resource development in the Plateau state.

Furthermore, the study revealed that linear linear distance to school has significant impact on students' achievement since students who stay far and trek distance beyond the UNESCO 2.5km recommended norm do not perform better that students who stay near the schools in the Mathematics and English. The chi-square result which p value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance of which the null hypotheses was rejected but stressed this, Also, these findings agreed with Mathew (2015) who arrived that trekking long distances by students reduce assimilation levels of students and consequently affects their achievement, corroborating this, Okorie and Ezeh (2016) asserted that long distance trekking saps students' energy, makes them to arrive school late and do not have enough energy to participate in school activities after being punished for late coming.

Findings

The following are the findings based on the researched questions and hypotheses formulated.

1. Findings revealed that enrolment status of junior secondary school students in Plateau State from 2020 to 2024 was decreasing.
2. The profile of students' academic achievements in basic education certificate examination in Plateau State from 2020 to 2024 revealed a general decline in Mathematics and English Language.
3. It was found out that linear distance to school has significant impact on students academic achievements. Students who stay far and trek long distances perform lower than those who stay near the school in Mathematics and English Language.

Conclusion

Access to education is very key because decline in enrolment will not argue well for educational development and inability to acquire skills and knowledge needed for individual and societal development. School location plays a vital role in access and academic achievement. Poverty education policies should be in place to improve the livelihood of households economically, This is because students whose families are of high educational status and from well to do home, have a far better dance of excelling in their academic achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend the following: -

1. There is need for prioritizing education spending and scholarship programmes by education stakeholders to target those who go missing from the education system.
2. Teachers should be motivated by education stakeholders by prompt payment of salaries as well as provision of learning facilities to boost students' academic achievements.

3. There should be proper school mapping by education proprietors to site schools where it is accessible to students in the state especially those from rural areas.

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