

Perceived Influence of Examinations and Holiday Periods on Management of Public Lower Basic Schools in North Central-Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study investigated the perceived influence of examinations and holiday periods on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were formulated and tested for the study. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study consists of all 110, 022 teachers from 12,775 public primary schools in the North Central Nigeria. The sample size for the study was 399 teachers. This sample was in line with Yamene (1970) formula for determining sample size. The study employed multi-stage sampling procedure which include purposive sampling technique, proportionate stratified sampling and accidental sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire titled ‘‘Examinations and Holiday Periods and Management of School Questionnaire (EHPMSQ)’’. The instrument was validated by five experts with overall reliability coefficient of 0.82. Data collected were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions, while chi-square goodness-of-fit was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that examination periods and holiday periods have significant perceived influence on management of public primary schools in North Central Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that Ministry of Education across the nation should implement a standardized examination timetable for all public primary schools to ensure consistency. This will help reduce confusion and allow for better resource planning. Also, the Nigeria Education Development and Research Council (NEDRC) should create a well-structured academic calendar that balances instructional time and holidays, ensuring that students have adequate learning periods without being overloaded.*

Keyword: *School Calendar Policy, Management, examination periods and holiday periods*

Introduction

Efforts have been made to develop education in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Various policies related to education have been formulated such as the appointment of principal officers, funding, staff recruitment and quality assurance. Others are provision of facilities, curriculum, and academic programs. Other policies, such as the school calendar, teacher salary scale, teaching methods, curricular content, graduation requirements, school infrastructure investment, Joint Matriculation Examination Board (JAMB), and school calendar policy, also have a significant influence on educational policies in Nigeria. Unfortunately, these efforts appear not to have produced the desired stability in the educational sector, resulting in a deplorable condition. It is so bad that some resourceful Nigerians prefer to send their children to Europe, America, and even small African countries. Apart from the general problems of policy formulation and implementation common to most countries, especially those in the third world, some factors have been identified as peculiar to Nigeria and inhibiting its educational growth. Nigeria is known as the giant of Africa in terms of resourcefulness as a major oil and gas producer. Paradoxically, most Nigerians appear not to be educated due to the education policies introduced by the government which seem to affect efficient and effective management of schools.

School management is a major focus in lower basic schools. Educational management is the process of providing leadership within an educational system to coordinate activities and make decisions that lead to the attainment of the school's objectives, which are effective teaching and learning (Adeyemi, 2010). The school head teacher needs to coordinate the activities of the school to achieve these objectives and must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties. Management involves the judicious utilization of human, material, financial, and time resources to achieve organizational goals or objectives (Akpakwu, 2013). Effective management school ensures efficiency and effectiveness in the use of available resources while overcoming any constraints that might hinder the achievement of objectives of school depends on the educational policies put in place.

Education policy comprises principles and guidelines formulated in the educational sphere, as well as a collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems (Organization of Economic Community Development, 2017). Educational policies designed in the university education sector encompass school calendars, teacher salary scales, teaching methods, curricular content, graduation requirements, school infrastructure investment, and the values that schools are expected to uphold and model for various educational levels, including early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education (Yaro, 2018). Policy is necessary to guide the formulation of any educational reform. It is a process that enables the political process to acknowledge the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interests and desires among its participants. It provides guidance for properly directed and coordinated action towards the attainment of desired educational goals. The success of any educational system or reform in any nation depends on the policies put in place, how they are implemented, and how they are managed. Policies are generally adopted by a governing body within an organization (Nweke, Muhammad, Chukwu, Uche, Madu & Ezurike, 2021). The implication is that educational policies enable effective and efficient management of school. However, this study focused on holiday periods and examination periods.

Examination is a formal test taken to demonstrate one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject or to obtain a qualification. Examinations are a method for assessing what pupils have acquired from learning activities in terms of knowledge, thinking, reasoning, character development, and industry (Maiyo, 2012). Schultz and Sharp (2012), which found no statistical difference in academic performance and attendance records of pupils in introductory computer courses. Giorgio (2016) reported that the concentration of exams in a short period might increase pupils' stress levels, negatively impacting their performance. The academic calendar can adversely affect students' final exam performance, as it often requires pupils to take multiple exams within a short timeframe. Furthermore, Zeek, Savoie, Matthew,

Kennemur, Jingjing, Paul and Salisa (2015) reported that more than half of student pharmacists obtained less than seven hours of sleep per night during a typical school week, and even less sleep on the night before an examination. The conduct of examinations has become a more central aspect of teaching and learning in schools. The school calendar provides guidance for schools, specifying when examinations will be held and when holidays will take place.

A holiday is a day or period of time set aside for leisure, relaxation and celebration. It is a time when pupils are given break from their regular school or daily routines to enjoy themselves, spend time with their parents and siblings at home (Pedersen, 2014). The timing and duration of school holidays can vary depending on the country and educational system (Ministry of Education, MOE, 2014). The dates and periods of school holidays vary considerably throughout the world, and there is usually some variation even within the same jurisdiction. Governments often legislate on the total number of school days for schools. According to Pedersen (2012), holidays given below apply to primary and secondary education. Nigeria, school system is divided into three terms, namely first term, second term and third term.

The time period designs for holiday in school affect the management of lower basic schools. This is because, many primary school at the time of holiday appear not to cover their syllabus or content and conduct school co-curricular activities in school. Shinwell and Defeyter (2017) who found a notable effect of time on spelling scores. Their study showed that spelling scores were significantly higher at the end of the summer term compared to the start of the new academic year. McMullen and Rouse (2014), which found that summer break had no significant impact on the academic achievement of average students. Additionally, the study found no evidence that year-round schooling benefited any racial subgroup in terms of academic performance.

These challenges to pose by school calendar policy on the management of lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria appear to be rooted in Nigeria's historical struggles to establish an effective educational system. Despite the formulation of educational policies, such as the school calendar, by various governments, their successful implementation has been hindered by political instability. This instability has, in turn, deterred the political will necessary to execute these policies. One significant consequence of this unstable school calendar policy is that many pupils who should be enrolling in and attending school often find themselves roaming the streets. The specific timing outlined in the school calendar for school resumption coincides with periods when many parents prefer to send their children to engage in street vending or work on farms. Consequently, the policy appears to impede the comprehensive coverage of academic content, the proper administration of tests and assessments, and the academic performance of pupils in schools.

Teachers frequently find themselves grappling with the challenge of insufficient time to cover their syllabus before conducting examinations and proceeding on holiday as enshrined in school calendar policy. This situation could be applicable to the management of lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria, which is what has motivated the researcher to investigate the influence of school calendar policy on the management of lower basic schools in North central, Nigeria with particular focus on examination periods and holiday periods.

Statement of the Problem

In every educational system, the primary objective is to prepare young individuals to face future challenges and develop them to meet the nation's manpower needs. However, various government policies seem to hinder this goal. One such policy is the school calendar. The school calendar policy has become a topic of global debate due to its impact on school management, particularly at the secondary school level. The issues associated with it contribute to low academic achievement among pupils and,

in some cases, lead to school dropouts. These challenges stem from factors involving pupils, teachers, other school personnel, and the learning environment.

Today, many schools find it difficult to implement examination and holiday periods due to the limited time allocated for the start and end of terms. This leaves little room for non-academic activities, as academic programs dominate the school schedule. The school calendar policy also affects student attendance, especially for pupils from agricultural or pastoral regions. In such areas, parents often prioritize farm work over schooling, particularly during the harvest season, leading to poor school attendance and lower enrolment rates. Additionally, the amount of time allocated for teaching and learning activities appears to have a significant impact on the academic performance of secondary school pupils. The problem of this study is put in a question form thus: What is the perceived influence of examinations and holiday periods on management of lower basic schools in North Central, Nigeria?

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate perceived influence of examination and holiday periods on management of public lower basic schools in North Central, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. determine perceived influence of examination periods on management of public lower basic schools in North-Central Nigeria.
2. ascertain perceived influence of holidays periods on management of public lower basic schools in North-Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the perceived influence examination periods on management of public lower basic schools in North-Central Nigeria?
2. What is the perceived influence of holiday periods on management of public lower basic schools in North Central-Nigeria?

Hypotheses

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

1. Examination periods have no significant perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North-Central Nigeria.
2. Holiday periods have no significant perceived influence on management of public lowerbasic schools in North Central-Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed survey research design. This is a type of design that gather data from a large number of subjects from a representative sample of the population. The population of the study consists of all 110, 022 teachers from 12, 775 public primary schools in the North Central Nigeria. The sample size for the study is 399 teachers from a population of 110,022 teachers in 12,775 public primary schools in North Central Nigeria. This sample is in line with Taro Yamene (1970) formula for determining sample size. The study employed multi-stage sampling procedure. In this study the following sampling techniques was used: purposive sampling technique, proportionate stratified sampling and accidental sampling technique in different stages.

The instrument for data collection was questionnaire titled “Examinations and Holiday Periods and Management of School Questionnaire (EHPMSQ)”. It was divided into two sections, Sections A and

B. Section A which contained instruction to the respondents, while Section B contained a total number of 10 items divided in two clusters. . Cluster A comprised items 1-5 which collected information on examination periods and management and Cluster B had items 6-10, which solicited information on holiday periods and management. The instrument was structured on a four-point rating scale with response options of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. It was validated by five experts. Two experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Guidance and Counselling and one expert in Educational Administration and Planning, Department of Educational Administration and Planning, College of Education, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi and two in Educational Management, Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Benue State University, Makurdi with reliability coefficient of examination periods and management=0.76 and holiday periods and management=0.76. The reliability coefficient of 0.82 was considered high enough and reliable. The descriptive statistics of Mean Scores and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. The decision rule was based on the real limit of numbers $4+3+2+1=10/4=2.50$. The chi-square test of goodness of fit was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 3: What is the perceived influence examination periods on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Perceived Influence of Examination Periods on Management of Public Lower Basic Schools in North Central Nigeria

Item No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Std	Decision
1	Test period schedule on school timetable makes teachers rush to cover up the syllabus to enable teachers organize drama activities for pupils.	380	140	209	17	14	3.25	0.71	Agree
2	Assignments periods indicate that the assessment timetable is given to pupils, thereby providing an opportunity for teachers to plan for more lessons.	380	210	139	20	11	3.44	0.73	Agree
3	During test periods in school, drama activities are put on hold to enable teachers to supervise pupils better.	380	243	105	22	10	3.53	0.72	Agree
4	During terminal examinations, sports activities are suspended to allow head teachers to have effective monitoring of exams.	380	141	205	22	12	3.25	0.70	Agree

5	During assessment periods, pupils are not allowed to go to other schools for competition, thereby enabling the school head to monitor their activities.	380	207	139	19	15	3.42	0.76	Agree
Cluster Mean & Std							3.38	0.72	Agree

Table 1 shows the mean scores of items 1-5 as 3.25, 3.44, 3.53, 3.25 and 3.42 with corresponding Standard Deviations of 0.71, 0.73, 0.72, 0.70 and 0.76 respectively. All the items were rated above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.38 and Standard Deviation of 0.72 which is above the cut-off point of 2.50 is agreed that examination periods have perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Research Question 4: What is the perceived influence of holiday periods on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria?

Table 4: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Perceived Influence of Holiday Periods on the Management of Public Lower Basic Schools in North Central Nigeria

Item No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Std	Decision
6	During the holidays, teachers are hardly found in school, thereby slowing making decisions very difficult in school.	380	172	173	24	11	3.33	0.72	Agree
7	A vacation period which starts from July and ends in first week of September makes head teachers to be absent from school, which leads to poor supervision of ongoing projects.	380	140	205	19	16	3.23	0.73	Agree
8	The September date schedule for school's resumption enables school head to prepare ahead.	380	173	177	15	15	3.34	0.74	Agree
9	School vacation periods enable head teachers to provide sports equipment ahead of pupils' resumption in school.	380	106	243	20	11	3.17	0.65	Agree
10	The first term beginning from September to December (Christmas) attracts many new entrants,	380	243	103	20	14	3.51	0.76	Agree

	such that performing of duties becomes difficult for head teachers.								
	Cluster Mean & Std						3.32	0.72	Agree

Table 2 indicates the mean scores of items 6-10 as 3.33, 3.23, 3.34, 3.17 and 3.51 with corresponding Standard Deviations of 0.72, 0.73, 0.74, 0.65 and 0.76 respectively. All the items were rated above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.72 and Standard Deviation of 0.72 which is above the cut-off point of 2.50 is agreed that there is holiday periods have perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1: Examination periods have no significant influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Table 3: Chi-square Analysis on Perceived Influence of Examination Periods on Management of Public Lower Basic Schools in North Central Nigeria.

	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Df	Sig. Level	χ^2	P. Value	Decision
Observed	188	159	20	13						
					380	3	0.05	291.22 ^a	0.00	Sig.
Expected	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0						

P<0.05

Table 3 shows that the Chi-square calculated value of 291.22, Df = 3 and a P-value of 0.00 which is less than alpha-value (α) of 0.05 (P<0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that examination periods have no significant perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria is rejected. This shows that examination periods have significant perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: Holiday periods have no significant perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-square Analysis on Perceived Influence of Holiday Periods on Management of Public Lower Basic Schools in North Central Nigeria.

	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Df	Sig. Level	χ^2	P. Value	Decision
Observed	167	180	20	13						
					380	3	0.05	253.79 ^a	0.00	Sig.
Expected	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0						

P<0.05

Table 4 indicates that the Chi-square calculated value of 253.79, Df = 3 and a P-value of 0.00 which is less than alpha-value (α) of 0.05 (P<0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that

holiday periods have no significant perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria is rejected. This shows that holiday periods have significant perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The finding showed that examination periods have perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria. This result is consistent with the study by Schultz and Sharp (2012), which found no statistical difference in academic performance and attendance records of pupils in introductory computer courses. This finding aligns with Giorgio (2016) who reported that the concentration of exams in a short period might increase pupils' stress levels, negatively impacting their performance. The academic calendar can adversely affect students' final exam performance, as it often requires pupils to take multiple exams within a short timeframe. Furthermore, this finding corroborates the results of Zeek et al. (2015) who reported that more than half of student pharmacists obtained less than seven hours of sleep per night during a typical school week, and even less sleep on the night before an examination. Zeek et al. also noted that nearly half of the students experienced daytime sleepiness almost every day before exams. Reduced sleep duration on the night before an exam was associated with higher course grades and semester grade point averages (GPAs). This is because the test period schedule on the school timetable causes teachers to rush to cover the syllabus in order to organize drama activities for pupils. Assignment periods indicate that the assessment timetable is given to pupils, which provides teachers with an opportunity to plan additional lessons. During test periods, drama activities are put on hold to allow teachers to better supervise pupils. Similarly, during terminal examinations, sports activities are suspended to enable head teachers to effectively monitor the exams. During assessment periods, pupils are not allowed to attend competitions at other schools, allowing the school head to more closely monitor their activities. In the opinion of the researcher, this means that examination periods play a critical role academic operations, resource management, and educational outcomes. This means that effective management of examination periods allows for better academic planning, ensures fair assessments, and promotes the well-being of both teachers and students. However, poorly managed examination periods always lead to disruptions in the academic calendar, increased stress, logistical challenges, and even integrity issues, all of which can significantly affect the quality of education delivered in public primary schools.

Moreover, the findings indicated that holiday periods have perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria. This aligns with the research by Shinwell and Defeyter (2017), who found a notable effect of time on spelling scores. Their study showed that spelling scores were significantly higher at the end of the summer term compared to the start of the new academic year. Additionally, spelling scores were significantly higher seven weeks after returning to school than at the beginning of the autumn term. Although spelling performance initially declined after the summer holiday, it improved beyond baseline levels within seven weeks of returning to school. The study also observed a main effect of school on spelling scores, with children from schools 2 and 3 outperforming those from other schools. There was no significant effect of time on word reading scores. However, reading scores varied by school, with children from schools 2 and 3 showing better performance than those from other schools. This study is the first in the UK to demonstrate that, after a summer break of seven weeks, there was a period of learning loss or stagnation in spelling among secondary school-aged children in low SES areas. Nonetheless, after seven weeks of teaching, these children caught up and surpassed their pre-summer break spelling levels. Conversely, the summer holiday did not result in a loss of word reading skills; reading scores remained consistent throughout the study. This finding supports the research by McMullen and Rouse (2014), which found that summer break had no significant impact on the academic achievement of average students. Additionally, the study found no evidence that year-round schooling benefited any racial subgroup in terms of academic performance. This is because during the holidays, teachers are hardly found in school, thereby slowing making decisions very difficult

in school. A vacation period which starts from July and ends in August causes head teachers to be absent from school, which leads to poor supervision of ongoing projects. The September date schedule for school's resumption enables school head to prepare ahead. School vacation periods enable head teachers to provide sports equipment ahead of pupils' resumption in school. The first term beginning from September to December (Christmas) attracts many new entrants, such that performing of duties becomes difficult for head teachers. According to the researcher, this means that effective management of these holiday periods ensure that schools maintain academic continuity, provide opportunities for teacher development, and adequately prepare facilities for the next term. However, poorly managed holiday periods lead to learning loss, increased operational costs, strained teacher-student relationships, and challenges in policy compliance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that examinations and holiday periods have perceived influence on management of public lower basic schools in North Central Nigeria.

Recommendations

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

1. Ministry of Education across the nation should implement a standardized examination timetable for all public primary schools to ensure consistency. This will help reduce confusion and allow for better resource planning. This can be achieved by working closely with state ministries of education to align examination schedules, ensuring that schools in different states or regions adhere to the same timelines.
2. The Nigeria Education Development and Research Council (NEDRC) should create a well-structured academic calendar that balances instructional time and holidays, ensuring that students have adequate learning periods without being overloaded. This can be achieved by introducing optional or remedial holiday programmes to help students who may need extra support or enrichment during breaks.

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