

Review

Enhancing students' performance in the English language through Literature-in-English in the secondary schools

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This paper examines the relationship between the English Language and Literature-in-English in secondary schools in Nigeria. The purpose is to explore and expose the interdependence of the two subjects in enhancing English language competence. Apart from the educational advantages, it is also in the opinion of the writer that language is not only a necessity for the formulation of thoughts but also part of the thinking process itself, which is one of the great attributes of a literary man, that is, power of intuition. Considering the "Siaseme twin composition" of the two subjects, especially in a second language situation in Nigeria, the integration of the two, it is argued in this paper will, no doubt, enhance language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as sub-skills of language such as pronunciation, comprehension, vocabulary development, perception, composition, etc. It is the conviction of the writer that Literature-in-English should form an integral part of the English language curriculum and examinations of May/June and November/December Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSCE: WAEC, NECO and NABTEB). Note: West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB).

Key words: English Language, secondary schools, language, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Literature is generally defined as a collection of writings on any given subject or field of endeavours. However, there also exists some technical definitions of literature. Alorams (1981) defines literature as "the ability to create, imagine, express an idea or composition through a definite method and the study of the method itself". In other words, literature is seen as a subject which is unique in contents and methodology. *The Oxford Concise English Dictionary* also defines literature as "written works, especially those whose value lies in beauty of language or in emotional effect". The definition only

portrays literature as an expression of ideas, thoughts and feelings with emphasis on the aesthetic values of language. In another perspective, literature is essentially seen as an expression of the cultural experience of a people and language is part of this cultural experience. To know a people's language, their literature is highly indispensable. Literature is an art of language and words are the essential ingredients of language.

The definitions examined above show that Literature-in-English and the English language are tools in the hand of each other. While language is a tool by which literature

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establishes an existence, literature serves as a tool through which language propagates itself. The relationship between language and literature is an interdependent one; literature does not and cannot exist independent of language because language is the conveyor of literature. An understanding of the nature and structure of language would enable us to appreciate a literary work much better because language and thoughts are the raw materials of literature. Literary writers use language in their works. Literature can be used to teach language, for instance, drama and poetry can be used for the teaching of speech while prose can be used to teach summary and comprehension. New words and expressions are acquired through literature. Through this means, vocabulary development is enhanced. In literature classes, when students are made to tell stories their speech fluency is sharpened. Bright and Macgregor (1970) stated:

It is in literature that the student is most likely to find words used memorably with force and point. It is there that he will find words used in their widest range of contexts, and there he will find words passionately or delicately conveying emotions; learn to see wholes greater than the sum of their parts.

Literature-in-English serves as a medium of propagating our cultural values and ideas, and for the development of our literary competence. It enhances the students' general competence in the English language. Adesuyi (1991:236) said:

The best way to regard the relationship between language and thought is to say that language is a tool in the way an arm with its hand is a tool, something to work with like any other tool and at the same time part of the mechanism that drives tools, part of us. Language is not only necessary for the formulation of thought, but is part of the thinking process itself.

Literature-in-English is not taught in schools just for the purpose of doing it but for the various functions it is expected to play in language acquisition, opinion formation and moral development. In order to achieve all these, the teachers should make sure they teach Literature-in-English effectively. With this view, James (1968:130) said:

While understanding the cause of waning of interest in the arts, particularly in English Literature with which I am immediately concerned, I maintain that Literature serves as useful and specific function in human lives. There is a general need for us to state more clearly the function it could serve in our

societies.... It must however not be forgotten that food for the mind is as important as food for the body. It follows therefore that Literature is just as important as these other subjects

The quotation above implies that while science and technology are very important especially in developing nations, it is also very essential for Africans to preserve their rich literary heritage and to know more about that of their contemporaries in the outside world. So there should be a keen interest in literature as a medium of propagating cultural values and performing linguistic functions. Since language is a means of communication among members of any given society and literature reflects the customs, tradition, culture, religion and the norms of any given society, it is clear, therefore, that the interconnected-ness of these two subjects can never be over emphasized. The effective teaching and learning skills of language: as listening, speaking, reading and writing together with the various sub-skills which are all important in language learning and Literature-in-English are also emphasized. This will make the impact of teaching and learning the English language immensely felt. These sub-skills include: comprehension, vocabulary development, recognition, perception, oral reading, spelling, pronunciation, enunciation, visual and audio-visual perception and so on. The fact that intensifying the teaching and learning of Literature-in-English among the secondary school students could enhance their performance in the English language is an undisputable fact because the components of literature-in-English can impact the learner's competence in English.

The components of Literature-In-English and its effects on the learners' competence in English

The teaching of literature-in-English is activity-oriented and it should provide for the students meaningful and enjoyable activity. There are three genres of literature: drama, prose and poetry and all these aspects should be well taught.

The Teaching of Drama: For the teaching of drama as a genre of literature to effectively enhance good performance in the English language, the teacher should endeavour to use the following teaching methods:

(i) Group discussion: Group discussion refers to a small group of people who communicate face-to-face in order to fulfill a common purpose and achieve a group goal.

It could also be defined as the process whereby two or more people exchange ideas or information in a face-to-face situation to achieve a goal. This definition shows that the teaching of drama requires the active participation in

group discussion while teaching drama. Since literature is language-in-action, emphasis should be placed on the students' participation in shared experiences, events and situations.

Its effects on students' performance in English

The combined efforts of students in the discussion will produce better ideas and correct their English speaking deficiencies. Group discussion also helps the students to absorb information and gain a wide range of group communication. It promotes fluency through practice.

(ii) Role-Playing: This involves the teacher giving roles to the learners to act out in small groups or in pairs. It provides a number of possibilities for communication practice.

Effects: It also helps students to create and recreate events thereby improving their communicative skills. It helps the students to perform better in aspects of English like oral or written essay.

The teaching of prose and its effects

The teaching of literature is to facilitate a change in the attitude of the learners and to widen their knowledge of the literary heritage: sharpen their sensitivity and develop their vocabulary. To achieve all these, the Literature teacher should be conversant with the following approaches:

Literary Appreciation: Here the teacher explains and treats the different aspects such as the plot, characters, theme, style and setting and relates them to the goal of enhancing the students' good performance in the English language.

The Creative Response Approach: This involves making the students read, recite and dramatize a piece of literature in order to have a meaningful study of the usefulness of literature. The development of a methodology that is based on informed concept of reading and response rather than conceived ideas of comprehension is more useful to the students.

Effect: The approach helps to develop the reading abilities of the learners. It sharpens the spoken English of the students.

The teaching of poetry and its effects

Poetry is meant to be enjoyed. There is the need to

create a lively atmosphere while teaching it. For instance, there should be active participation of the students in the lesson like recitation, dramatization etc. The teacher should make the students understand that poetry involves a language teaching methods in teaching particular poems in order to make the lesson real. Such methods should involve the following:

Rhythm: This is a flow of some words or phrases in verse or prose determined by various relations of long and short syllables. This can be effectively used for teaching sounds in English.

Choral Reading: The teacher guides the students to read poems together in the class either in rows or in pairs. This helps the students to develop the skill of reading aloud.

Dramatization and Miming: This is when the students are made to demonstrate the roles of the character in the poem. This helps to develop the speaking skills of students.

BASIC SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH

All the major skills and sub-skills mentioned earlier are very important for communication which is nothing but literature and language in application.

It is agreed that all these skills are the heart of language arts: Listening, speaking, reading and writing which cannot occur without communication. Listening and reading take place only when the learners are actually sharing the ideas and views of a communicator (a speaker) who performs the speaking with regards to the level of the background experience of the students in the English language.

The Nigerian child learning English as a second language starts learning it at school. He/She does not have adequate vocabulary from home and this can adversely affect the reading and listening comprehension, which are basic for understanding the messages of any writer. Therefore, it is very necessary for our writers of Literature-in-English and the English language texts to write their texts in such ways that will favour the ability and language level of the students to give room for understanding ability of the texts.

Listening: The teacher can develop the listening ability of students by involving them in such activities as storytelling, conversation drills, dictation, etc. The students must be taught how to take down notes while listening, translating words in their own words, generating the ideas being expressed and developing the ability to recall information.

Unoh (1974) outlined some basic problems in listening. These include the following: poor discrimination of sounds e.g.

sit	/sit/or/slt/
seat	/si:t/
pull	/pul/
poor	/pu:l/
bet	/bet/
but	/b.t/
bat	/bæt/

Through enriching activities and exercises in the classroom, mostly in the form of repetition, good pronunciation habit will be formed.

Speaking: Speaking is another important skill that the teacher of Literature and English should develop in the students. Oyinloye (1999) defined speaking as “a production of meaningful utterances in an attempt to communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings”.

Speaking entails pronunciation, social variation with language, grammar, etc. The teacher must emphasize the current teaching/learning of all these aspects of English.

Unoh (1974) also analyzed the difficulties that make speaking (spoken English) of the students sound unintelligible. These problems are identified in intonation and stress patterns such as:

Noun	Verb
¹ contact	con ¹ tact
¹ present	pre ¹ sent
¹ import	im ¹ port
¹ conduct	con ¹ duct

A good teacher of English as a second language must pay attention to the supra-segmental features such as stress, rhythm and intonation as well as vowels and consonants as segmental features. The language teacher has to understand all these concepts. Minimal pair is also a useful concept in teaching communicative skills very well.

Minimal pairs can be presented in word or sentence contexts as follows:

tan	:	van
ten	:	then
bath	:	birth

- (i) The fan is blowing hot.
(ii) van is moving away.

Reading: Leedy (1956) defined Reading as “a matter of searching for the thought that was in the mind of the author and which now lies in the meaning of the words which are before the reader”. Also, James (1984) said

that “Reading is the process of receiving, organizing and handling data by the human mind”.

Some authors like Cray (1949), Fry (1963) and Hughes (1965) agreed in various areas of reading, listening and sub-skills and concluded that intensifying actions of these skills during the teaching and learning processes in Literature will go a long way to enhance performance in the English Language since Literature-in-English paves way for more extensive reading. It is true that extensive reading facilitates students’ interest in developing their reading skills to increase their vocabulary.

On the intonation problem of the learners of English as a second language, Obeameta (1976) observed that moods and emphasis are used as marks of intonation and stress. He gave the following examples:

I saw him	-	emphasis on the subject
I ¹ saw him	-	emphasis on the verb
I saw ¹ him	-	emphasis on the object.

The change in the sound and shifts in emphasis create changes in meanings in the structure. Students’ inability to detect elements of bias, falsehood, distortion, persuasion, sensationalism, emotional and situational meanings that might be conveyed by spoken and written language are some causes of setback in learning English Language.

Unoh (1972), in carrying out an investigation on the incidence and patterns of reading difficulties among university students in the Faculties of Arts and Science, diagnosed some areas of weaknesses; they are: slow reading rate, lack of understanding and interpretation, comprehension of main ideas, word power and retention, etc.

Also, Unoh (1972) in a subsequent survey of reading problems in Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States detected ten types of reading problems among four hundred and fifty secondary school students. They are:-

- Slow reading rate (80 words per minute).
- Slow comprehension rate (48 words per minute).
- Difficulty in reading for gist (main items) and making good summaries.
- Difficulty in distinguishing relevant or irrelevant details.
- Ineffective recall of what is read.
- Uncritical reading behaviour.
- Difficulty with intensive study-type reading.
- Difficulty with creative reading.
- Inadequate vocabulary or word-process.
- Inadequate reading interest.

Remedies to these inadequacies could be through effective teaching of Literature-in-English in our secondary schools. Poor development and teaching of vocabulary and all language skills have seriously inhibited development of excellence in literary studies. Looking at the curriculum, it will be realized that more time is devoted to the

teaching of the English Language and yet low achievement is recorded in the students' performance in external examinations.

Since literature-in-English can be used to solve some language problems, it is essential therefore to intensify action on its effective teaching and learning through one of the major channels of enhancing good results, that is, teaching of Literature-in-English.

Sapir (1963) opined that:

Probably nothing better illustrates the formal dependence of Literature on language than prosodic aspect of poetry...not merely because poetry grew up in connection with the chart and dense but because alternations of long and short syllables were keenly live facts in the daily economy of the language. The tonal accents, which were only secondarily Stress phenomenal, help to give the syllable its quantitative individuality.

From every indication, it is obvious that Literature-in-English and the English Language are intertwined and should never be separated in order to promote the learning and comprehension of the English Language to enhance good results.

Moody (1971:124) further said that the purpose of learning any language is of course communication and what is Literature but communication. This view also stresses the significance of the interrelationship between Literature-in-English and the English Language.

PROMOTION OF INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE READING SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH

The English Language is the medium of instruction through which the students are expected to achieve a very large measure of mental, emotional and skillful development. Majority of these students enter secondary schools with very low competence in the language, therefore, so their educational development will be retarded. Thus, intensive reading is very important in language learning, giving priorities to the following skills and abilities in the English Language:

- (a) Listening with understanding.
- (b) Speaking and being understood with appropriate stress, rhythm, intonation, pronunciation, command of grammar and lexis adequate for communication.
- (c) Reading with understanding, reading intensively for full meaning, reading quickly for special purposes such as getting the main points or looking for required information, reading widely for pleasure and information.
- (d) Writing and being understood at and beyond the sentence level for specific relevant purpose.

- (e) Summarizing and note making.

The four language skills mentioned in the logical order above (item a – e) are required by students learning the English Language and at the same time important for learning Literature-in-English. Presently, Literature-in-English is not made compulsory for students in secondary schools like the English Language but it could be an aid to the students in the English Language. This is made clear in the area of intensive and extensive reading when it comes to learning the English Language and mastering it. For instance, intensive reading skill aims at helping the students to understand what they read, what they want to read or what they are required to read. The teachers want them to read with understanding and at a speed appropriate for understanding the more the purpose of the reading. We want to help our students to think more carefully and comprehend properly.

Also, the teachers try to develop understanding by helping the students to think more carefully and apply what they read to their own experience and other situations. Finally, we want to train them to find out and relate the main points in what they read to their life activities. So the following specific objectives are identified for projecting students' good performance and competence in the English Language.

A. Training the Skill of:

- i. Reading for exact meaning.
- ii. Reading for implied meaning.
- iii. Reading for relationship of thoughts.
- iv. Reading for applied meaning.
- v. Reading at speed appropriate to the reading purpose.

B. Training the Skill of Summarizing

This skill follows from training in reading for exact and implied meaning and for relationship and then drawing out the main points. Students normally read popular topics like folktales, sports and games, detective stories, school life, etc and nearly all these are included in Literature-in-English and since Literature deals with the culture of any society, some of the topics read will help the children to think and solve problems within and outside the school. This will broaden their minds and prepare them for life in order to meet any future challenge.

According to Adesuyi (1991), they can get such topics from:

- a. Textbooks specially written to train the intensive reading skills at different levels.
- b. Textbooks for other subjects which the students have.
- c. The school or class library where passages can be

duplicated and

d. Materials from contemporary life, newspapers, advertisement, etc.

Literature-in-English is of great help in language learning through extensive reading skills. The school library is very useful for extensive reading that relates to study skills; and majority of the books provided in this library are literature books particularly books for extensive reading. This will widen the students' horizon in the act of vocabulary development and its usage and to promote their thoughts.

Also, as in Unoh (1972) extensive reading enhances good performance in the English Language in the following ways:

- a. It arouses and sustains the pupils' desire to read for pleasure, interest and information both as a relaxation activity and as a means of self-education.
- b. It develops in the students a personal taste for reading and personal response to what they read.
- c. It develops through systematic training, the ability to read with understanding at an appropriate speed.
- d. It develops the ability to take notes on what they read in response to specific questions or needs.

Most of the books read for the above purpose are usually based on Literature-in-English in order to enhance good performance in the English Language. If the teaching of Literature enables the students to develop a responsible attitude to their own education, they are not expected to always be taught but start to learn for themselves. This will develop the students' competence the more.

The implications of the teaching of Literature-in-English on the students' performance in the English Language could also be seen in the selection of books for extensive reading for the English Language learning whereby readers are graded to suit the average language competence of the class. Students are able to read with ease and enjoyment. Group work on one topic or the other for discussion is also encouraged for the students to develop confidence in expressing their ideas followed by class discussion. An episode from such book gives room for better understanding rather than cramming.

Also, links can be made with the students' experience and beliefs. Students can be given a set time to read an important episode with a question in mind to answer or think about as they read.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

William (1984:16) explained communicative competence as "The learner's ability to use language in its socio-cultural or interpersonal aspects beyond the sentence

level".

In another development, communicative competence is defined by Nunan (1989) as "The general human ability to use language, predicated upon the knowledge of the grammar of each particular language and the ability to produce and understand general and some specific texts in the language". The acquisition of communicative competence requires not only a surface knowledge of the language in question, but deep understanding of the basic skills of the language. For example, to communicate effectively, one needs a good understanding of the fundamentals of such language skills.

Also, the component, role and setting of such language use need to be studied.

Nunan (1989:194-195) pointed out that "The insight that communication was an integrated process rather than a set of discrete learning outcomes had created a dilemma for syllabus designers". For somebody to be competent in a particular language he needs to be exposed to all the relevant studies about it and this is why students' exposure to Literature-in-English is very necessary to enhance their communicative competence in the English language. The features of communicative competence in the teaching/learning of English as a second language can be discussed under such parameters as: phonology – the study of the organization of sounds into different discrete units of utterances, syntax which deals with how words are strung together to give meaningful statements, lexis – the total stock of words in a language and semantics which is the study of meaning. All these features if well-taught are aiming at developing the language skills in the students. Also, if the genres of Literature: drama, poetry and prose are well-explored, they will develop the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, which are elements of communicative competence in the learner.

Chomsky (1965) defined communicative competence as "Functional language proficiency". This includes the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning, involving interaction between two or more persons belonging to the same or different speech communities. Littlewood (1984:69) in his own discussion said that "Communicative competence refers to how people perform in a second language".

All the above views are concerned with how people can perform in a second language. Both the teaching of Literature-in-English and the English Language are concerned and connected with the enhancement of students' performance in the English Language.

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS AND THEIR TEACHING TECHNIQUES ON THE ENGLISH AND LITERATURE STUDENTS

In the teaching of English as a second language, the

teachers who are supposed to be professionally trained are required to use such methods or techniques that will enhance students' good performance. The art of reading novels is to improve upon the students' performance in the English Language. Since Nigeria is a multi-lingual society and not one of the Nigerian languages has been adopted as the official language, the English language has remained and will remain for a long time as the unifying national language and therefore a necessity for educational advancement. In effect, the language will continue to be very important in deciding the success or otherwise of students because it is the language of instruction in schools, language of academic and intellectual expressions and interactions among students.

If students are to succeed in their learning, they should be able to understand, read, speak and write the language without much difficulty. It is therefore very important that there should be a thorough teaching of the English Language and Literature-in-English so as to enhance students' performance and required competence which will help the students to function well in whatever position they find themselves later in life. It must also be emphasized that the English Language provides a body of material for training the students to become intellectual workers in the larger society. In order to achieve this aim, organised English courses should be graded. In addition, a sensible selection of Literature texts and a sensible approach to the teaching of these texts will pave way for effective and relevant communication, dealing with problems of generality and significance. The conception that Literature is one of the roads that lead to wisdom and that it enriches the spirit and provides deeper and more significant insights into the human life is one that must be really appreciated.

The psycholinguist would say that language is an outcome of activities of human mind. It is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. To appreciate a group of people, we have to study its language. All that human experience has achieved in the way of dealing with situation can be communicated through language.

Also, Sapir (1963) says: "Language does not exist independently of culture. It is part of culture as well as a vehicle for the expression of culture". It is more than a means of communication. Sanusi (2001) says:

Language is used for phatic communion, that is, as a social regulator; for ceremonial purposes; as an instrument of action; to keep records; to convey orders and information; to influence people; to enable self-expression; and to embody and enable thought.

This shows that no human society can exist without language. Finally, Sanusi further says that, "Language is something more than sounds produced and heard; it is a

means of influencing personality". This implies that to use a language is to change one's mode of thinking. When children learn a language, they do not merely learn it but absorb and express ideas; they make the experience of others a part of their own mental lives. When they speak, they induce others to share the experiences through which they have passed.

If language is thus an important instrument for communication of ideas and thoughts, then its mastery either as mother tongue or foreign language must include the interpretation of symbols or words as a means of acquiring thought from written or printed materials (oral or written) including speech, spelling, grammar and composition. To master the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) therefore necessitates innovation from individual teachers of the language as well as the teachers of literature-in-English.

PROPOSAL FOR INTEGRATING LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH INTO ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

No doubt, literature-in-English and English Language are 'siamese twins'. We experience culture in thoughts, expressions and actions or outlooks and we express all these through language. Since curriculum is a programme of learning experiences (formal and informal) that the learner must pass through for a period of time, literature-in-English is of great help in language learning through extensive reading.

Presently, the contents of the English language for Junior Secondary Schools in terms of speech, comprehension, language structure and composition can be expanded in order to integrate the three genres of literature: prose, drama and poetry in the senior classes. Although literature will not be taught as a compulsory separate subject in the senior classes, the contents of the comprehension aspect of the English language could be re-worked to provide adequate experiences in prose, drama and poetry. The curriculum should ensure that, at least, a prescribed text in each of the genres: prose and drama should be part of the comprehension reading materials. While a collection of African, Caribbean, American, etc poems should also be considered.

The English textbook writers should also incorporate these in the contents of their textbooks spread into three terms for each of the three Senior Secondary School years. In an alternative, supplementary readers in the form of the prescribed textbooks should be used and integrated in the teacher's daily lessons and weekly scheme of work.

Group discussion, drama, role-playing, literary appreciation, creative-response, rhythm, choral reading approaches and others should be employed by teachers. In all, the language skills: listening, speaking, reading

and writing and sub-skills of spelling, pronunciation, comprehension, vocabulary development, recognition, perception, appreciation of literary beauty (aesthetics) should be emphasized in the new curriculum of the English language for Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria. In terms of evaluation, the following is suggested for SSCE (WAEC and NECO, NABTEB):

Paper One: Continuous writing

Part I: Test of essay writing. It should contain a question each on the various types of essays: letters, speeches, articles and descriptive, narrative, argumentative and expository essays. The latest syllabus requires candidate to write on only one out of these items. Emphasis is on Content, Organization, Expression and Mechanical Accuracy.

Part II: Test of Comprehension: Here, let's have two sections:

Section 1: Passages on registers

Section 2: Literature-in-English: Prose, drama and poetry (based on the prescribed texts).

Instead of having two passages, let's have a passage which will be an integrative one, i.e. a combination of topics on agriculture, engineering, education, judiciary, medicine, etc or a story.

Part III: Test of Summary

We may have a fairly long passage based on prose, drama or poetry or story (based on the prescribed texts) and/or a fairly long passage of between 500 and 650 words.

Paper Two: Multiple Choice Objective Test (as practiced now)

Paper Three: The test of Orals (as practiced now)

CONCLUSION

The relationship between language and literature is interwoven. Language is regarded as the conveyor of literature; and literature cannot exist independent of language. The English language can be enhanced through organized and systematic teaching of the three genres of literature. Also, the aspects of English: Speech, lexis and structure, comprehension and summary, and composition are already integrated in the teaching of literature.

It is also believed that language is not only essential for the formulation of thought but also part of the thinking process itself, which is a great attribute of the literary man, that is, the power of intuition. Language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing are better enhanced through intensive reading of prose, play and poem, using drama, group discussion, role-playing literary appreciation, creative-response and choral reading approaches to impact meaningfully on English language competence. Therefore, literature-in-English is recommended for inclusion in the Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria as an integral part of the English language curriculum and examinations of May/June and November/December SSCE (WAEC, NECO and NABTEB).

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