

ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE LEVELS OF PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ECONOMICS IN THE SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (SSCE) IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the performance levels of private school students in economics in the senior school certificate examination (SSCE) in Ebonyi State, Nigeria from 2016 to 2021 in *ex post facto/causal* design. Multi-stage sampling techniques were used in selecting the 12 schools that participated in senior secondary school economics examination. Data were collected with the aid of a checklist of students' results from the selected schools. Descriptive statistics were used in data analysis while T-test was used for hypotheses testing. Results showed that the performance of students in Economics in private urban secondary schools was better than their performance in private rural secondary schools. Greater percentage (70%) had credit pass in urban schools while 41% had credit pass in private rural schools. Majority (53%) of the male students had credit pass in Economics while 41% of female students obtained credit pass in Economics. Results of hypotheses tested showed that there is a significant difference in the mean performance of students in Economics in private urban and rural secondary schools and a significant difference also existed in the mean performance of male and female students in Economics SSCE in private secondary. It was concluded that students in urban private schools performed better in senior school certificate Economics examination relative to their counterparts in rural areas of Ebonyi State, with the male students scoring more credits than the female students. It is recommended that the students should be actively involved in the learning process for better performance in external examination

Keywords: Economics, Performance, urban, rural, private schools, Ebonyi State

JEL: A20, A21, D83, D91, I21

1. INTRODUCTION

Economics, as a social science, plays a vital role in equipping students with analytical tools and critical thinking skills necessary to understand economic principles, market dynamics, and the complexities of the global economy. In a world increasingly influenced by economic factors, the understanding of basic economic concepts, such as supply and demand, production possibility frontiers, and economic policies, is essential (Van Assche *et al.*, 2017; Ibekwe, 2021). The SSCE serves as a critical endpoint for high school education in many countries, determining students' readiness for higher education and their future employability. The SSCE is a pivotal examination in many countries, including Nigeria, as it not only reflects a student's academic capability but also influences subsequent educational and career opportunities (Abdullahi, 2022). Performance in this examination can serve as a strong indicator of the quality of educational provision, teaching effectiveness, and students' understanding of Economics. Given its significance, examining how private school students perform in this examination reveals crucial insights into educational efficacy

Private schools often represent an alternative to public education systems, providing distinct educational philosophies, smaller class sizes, and curricular flexibility. They tend to attract a segment of the population that can afford these institutions, often leading to disparities in educational quality and outcomes. The proliferation of private schooling has raised questions about educational equity and outcomes across different school types. Evaluating the

performance levels in Economics among private school students becomes essential for understanding these dynamics. Assessing the performance levels of private school students in Economics can provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in the education sector. Understanding these performance levels can help identify areas for improvement, inform teaching practices, and contribute to policy formulation aimed at enhancing educational outcomes (Oyededeji, 2017; Afolabi, 2018; Beunen *et al.*, 2022).

Despite the significant role that Economics education plays in equipping students with essential skills for understanding socio-economic issues, there seems to be a noticeable variability in the performance levels of private school students in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). This variability seem to have raised concerns about the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies employed, the alignment of the curriculum with assessment standards, and the socio-economic factors influencing student outcomes. Additionally, limited research seem to exists that specifically evaluates the assessment practices in private schools, particularly in relation to how they support or hinder students' understanding and application of economic concepts.

Secondary schools seem to have dilapidated infrastructure such as classroom with increased students' enrollment, shortage of qualified teachers, non-payment of teachers' salaries and allowances, lack of basic teaching and learning materials, yet they turn out graduates. What then is the performance of students trained in such environment in external examination like SSCE? In the light of the above, this study is to assess the performance levels of private school students in Economics in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study: assessed the performance of students in private secondary schools in urban and rural areas in Economics SSCE examinations from 2016/2017 to 2020/2021 school years; and examined the performance of male and female students in private secondary schools in Economics SSCE examination from 2016/2017 to 2020/2021 school years.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 Constructivist Theory

Constructivist Theory is an educational framework that posits that learners construct knowledge through experiences rather than passively absorbing information. Key proponents, such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, emphasized the importance of social interaction, cultural context, and active engagement in the learning process. Constructivist Theory: is based on the core principles of active learning, prior knowledge, social interaction, authentic contexts, critical thinking, and personal meaning making. The study on the assessment of performance levels of private school students in economics in the SSCE is anchored on the constructivist theory given the principles of Constructivist theory, thus, the assessment of private school students' performance in Economics involves approaches such as: holistic assessment, formative assessments, real-world problem solving, collaboration and peer learning, self-assessment, encouraging metacognition, and differentiation and inclusivity (Van Assche *et al.*, 2017; Beunen *et al.*, 2022).

By anchoring the assessment of private school students' performance in Economics within Constructivist Theory, educators can create a more dynamic and student-centered assessment environment. This approach not only evaluates academic knowledge and skills effectively but also prepares students for real-world economic challenges. The focus on active participation, collaboration, and personal meaning-making aligns with the goals of both Economics education and holistic student development.

2.1.2 Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters' (1977): This theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. In the context of private school students, the influence of teachers and peers can be significant in shaping students' performance in Economics through social interactions (Okoye *et al.*, 2022).

2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Nwokocha & Amadike (2019) comparatively studied the academic performance in private and public secondary schools in River State in a survey design. Four secondary schools were sampled: two private and two public schools in Ogba/Egbema, Ndoni Ahoada West Local Government Areas. Data were collected from the summary of results of West African Senior Secondary School Examination for the last four years from the principals of the schools and used for the study. Simple percentage was used to interpret and analyze the data collected to find out which type of school produced better result. For the test of the null hypothesis the chi-square was used to compare students' performance. The findings show that there is a higher percentage of better academic performance in the private schools than in the public schools.

Gbore & Abe (2017) examined academic achievement of science students of public and private senior secondary schools in Ondo state using twenty four secondary schools purposively and random selected with 360 students as sample for the study. Results of senior school certificate examination for year 2002/2003/2004 and 2004/2005 for the selected schools formed the data for the study. Data collected for the study were analyzed using mean standard deviation and t-test statistics. Results indicated that; (i) There is significant difference in the academic achievement of public and private secondary schools, (ii) There is no significant difference in academic achievement of science students from public and private schools in urban areas, (iii) There is significant difference in the academic achievement of science students from public and private schools in the rural areas. The results are in favour of private secondary schools.

Faleye & Afolabi (2018) investigated the predictive validity of Osun State Junior Secondary Certificate examination on their academic performance in the SSCE conducted by WASC. The subjects for the study comprised 505 students purposively selected from six secondary schools in Osun state Nigeria. Results were obtainable from 1993 through SSI, SSII and SSCE. The results showed that; 3 out of the 6 schools investigated had relatively low but significant correlation between JSCE and SSCE result; two had significant correlations between JSCE and SSCE results. Performance in JSCE English and mathematics could be used to predict performance in English and mathematics in SSI, SS2, and SSCE results. Overall performance in SSCE tends to have low capacity to predict performance in SSCE.

Maliki & Ibu (2019) made analysis of student performance in junior secondary school mathematics examination in Bayelsa state. They found that students' performance in mathematics in junior secondary school examination for 2006 was high. Male student performed better than their female counterparts in the examination. Student from rural schools perform better than student from urban schools in mathematics examination. And also student in private schools perform better than those from public schools

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical Framework Adopted

This study is anchored in Constructivist theory, the methodology adopted involved descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, specifically t-test to assess the performance of students in SSCE Economics examination in rural and urban as well as sex in those locations. This study uses Constructivist Theory because it accounts for individual and organizational factors,

making it ideal for studying performance of students in private schools (Okoye *et al.*, 2022). Constructivist Theory emphasizes holistic assessment, formative assessments, real-world problem solving, collaboration and peer learning, self-assessment, encouraging metacognition, and differentiation and inclusivity (Beunen *et al.*, 2022).

3.2 Design of the Study

The *Ex post facto/causal* research design was adopted in this study in order to test the performance of two groups which differ on characteristics such as location schools and gender. And as such the study was conducted in Ebonyi State

3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population of the study is the number of students who offered Economics in SSCE from 2016/2017 academic session to 2020/2021 session in the 194 registered private secondary schools. Out of the 194 private secondary schools, only 16 are located in urban areas of the state and 178 schools were in the rural areas (SEB, 2018). A multi stage sampling technique involving stratified and systematic random sampling technique was used for the study. First, the secondary schools in the state were divided into four strata namely private urban and private rural schools. From each of the strata six (6) schools were randomly selected to give a total of twelve (12) secondary schools. In the third stage, the total number of students that wrote Economics SSCE within the period of this study was selected. This was done by collecting the list of students and their performances from those selected secondary schools. A total number of twenty two thousand and thirty two (22,032) students were selected using a checklist from the population which served as a sample size for the study.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected from a check list. This helped the researcher to extract comprehensive information on students' performance and the students' results in Economics were the data used for the study.

3.5 Method of Data Collection

Data used for this study were collected with the aid of a checklist of students' results from the principals of the school which indicated their performances in Economics in various secondary schools. This was achieved through the help of school principals of various secondary schools chosen for the study.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation as well as graphs were used in data analysis while T-test was used to test the stated null hypotheses.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Question 1: Is there a difference in students' academic performance in senior school certificate Economics examination in private secondary schools in urban and rural areas in Ebonyi State? The result obtained was presented in Table 1, 2 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Mean performance of Students in SSCE Economics in Urban and Rural Private secondary schools from 2016-2021 in Ebonyi State

Private School Rural								Private School Urban							
Grade	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Mean	Grade	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Mean
D	4.4	5.0	8.0	5.0	12.0	4.7	6.52	D	15.9	22.2	18	22.2	21.3	21.3	19.92
C	29.8	35.0	38.0	32.0	41.0	31.7	34.58	C	47.5	50	54	39	54.4	53.6	49.75
P	43.4	49.0	45.0	46.0	36.0	57.6	46.17	P	32.2	25.6	21	25.4	18.9	32.7	25.97
F	22.4	11.0	9.0	17.0	11.0	5.9	12.72	F	4.4	2.2	7	13.4	5.4	13.7	7.68
Grand Mean							24.98								25.83
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100		Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

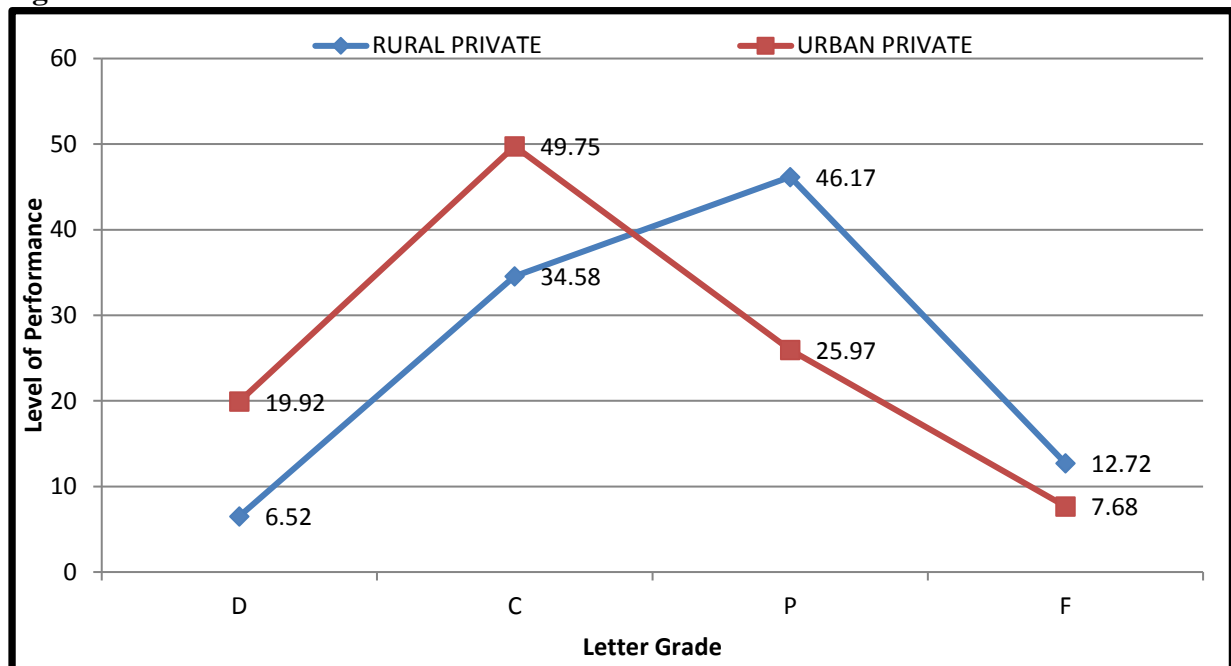
Source: Researcher's Computation 2023, Note: D = Distinction, C = Credit, P = Pass, F = Fail

Table 2: Average Percentage Credit Pass in Private Urban and rural Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State from 2016-2021 school years

Subject	% credit pass in urban Private Schools	% credit pass in rural private Schools
Economics	69.67%	41.10%

Sources: Researcher's Computation 2023

The result in Table 1 and 2 showed that the performance of students in Economics in private urban secondary schools in Ebonyi State was better than their performance in private rural secondary schools. Greater percentage (69.67%) which is approximately 70% had credit pass in urban schools while few (41%) had credit pass in rural private schools. This shows that those in urban schools performed better than those in rural schools. The grand mean for the urban schools was lower (25.85) against (24.98) obtained in rural secondary schools. The above findings were corroborated by Kajuru (2019) who affirmed that teachers are differentially distributed to schools apart from the tendency of qualified teachers to seek deployment in urban schools, more school facilities and services tended to be concentrated in urban schools that translate to better performance. Sander (2016) reported that teachers with the highest training are always employed in private schools of largest cities, and even more noticeably to the capital cities. This and more findings abound on the disparity in the quality of teachers in urban private schools compared to those in rural schools, which consequently affect students' academic attainment. Nwokocha & Amadike (2019) and Beunen *et al.*, (2022) also reported that teachers in urban private secondary schools in Ondo State tended to be better qualified compared to private schools in rural areas. Figure 1 further illustrated the result obtained, which also indicated that students in urban private secondary schools scored more distinction and credit while those in rural secondary schools scored more pass and fail. The overall result had indicated that urban private schools in Ebonyi State do better than rural private schools in terms of their students' performance in Economics SSCE within the period of this study.

Figure 1 Performance of Students in Economic in Urban and Rural Private School

Source: Researcher's plot 2023, Note: D = Distinction, C = Credit, P = Pass, F = Fail

5.2 Research Question 2

Is there difference on male and female students' academic performance in Senior School Certificate Economics Examination in private secondary schools in Ebonyi State? Results from the data collected were presented in Table 3, 4, and Figure 2

Table 3: Mean Performance of Male and Female Students in Economics in Private

Male Students in private schools								Female Students in private schools							
Grade	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Mean	Grade	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Mean
D	9.3	11.4	12.3	8.6	16.4	10.0	11.33	D	9.70	9.30	11.30	7.70	17.00	17.80	9.70
C	42.35	40.5	44.5	35.6	46.9	39.0	41.48	C	31.70	37.40	45.30	35.20	48.00	44.50	31.70
P	37.2	38.7	36.4	42.7	26.8	47.0	38.13	P	40.00	43.00	34.10	39.10	28.00	31.20	40.00
F	11.1	9.4	6.8	13.1	9.9	4.0	9.05	F	18.60	10.30	9.30	18.00	7.00	6.50	18.60
Grand Mean							24.99								25.00
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

Source: Researcher's Computation 2023. Note: D = Distinction, C = Credit, P = Pass, F = Fail

Table 4: Average Percentage Credit Pass among Male Female Students in Private Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State

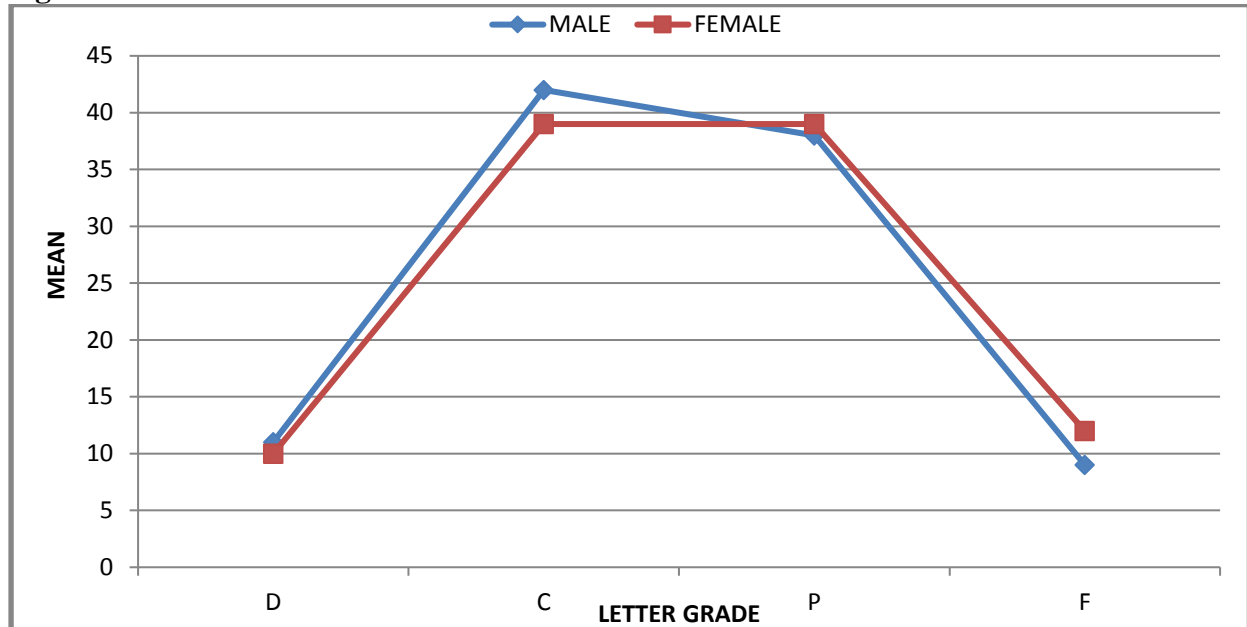
Subject	% credit pass by male in students Private Schools	% credit pass by female students in private Schools
Economics	53%	41 %

Sources: Researcher's Computation 2023

The result in Tables 3 and 4 showed that male students in private secondary schools performed better than female students. Majority (53%) of the male students had credit pass in Economics while only (41%) of the female students were able to obtain credit pass in Economics. Thus, male students were higher with about (23%). The grand mean of the male students was 24.99 while that of the female students was 25.00. This implied male students performed better than female students in Economics. The finding agreed with the findings of Oke, (2017) and

Onipede, (2018) who reported that performance of students' in external examination is a function of provision of instructional material and dedication of teachers to teaching and learning with male students that almost showing better performance in external examinations. The result of this study is also in line with those of Abdulhamind & Aminu (2019) and Lekan-Akomolafe (2021), who all observed that in nearly all cases reported, males outscored females.

Figure 2 Performance of Male and Female Students in Economic in Private School



Source: Researcher's plot 2023, Note: D = Distinction, C = Credit, P = Pass, F = Fail

5.3 Test of Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the mean performance of students in Senior School Certificate Economics Examination in Private urban and rural Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State from 2016/2017 to 2020/2021 academic years.

Table 5: T-Test between the Mean Performance of Students in Economics in Private urban and rural Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State

School type	\bar{X}	SD	T-cal	T-critical
Urban private school	69.67	8.14	22.72	2.920
Rural private school	41.10	0.75		

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2023

$d.f = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 4 - 2 = 2$; At 1%, $t_{\text{crit}} = 1.886$ and At 5%, $t_{\text{crit}} = 2.920$

Decision Rule: If $t_{\text{cal}} > t_{\text{tab}}$, reject the null hypothesis otherwise do not reject. Since $t_{\text{cal}} (22.72) > t_{\text{tab}} (2.920)$, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative was accepted. This implies that there is a significant difference in the mean performance of students in Economics in private urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean performance of male and female students in Senior School Certificate Economics Examination in private secondary schools in Ebonyi State from 2016/2017 to 2020/2021 academic year.

Table 6: T-test between Mean Performances of Students (male and female) in Economics in private schools in Ebonyi State

School type	\bar{X}	SD	T-cal	T-critical
Male students	52.81	0.23		
Female students	41.40	1.38	21.51	2.920

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2023

Decision Rule: If $t_{cal} > t_{tab}$, reject the null hypothesis otherwise accept. Since $t_{cal} (21.51) > t_{tab} (2.92)$ at 5 percent level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative was accepted. This implies there is significant difference in the mean performance of male and female students in Economics SSCE in private secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adequate knowledge of Economics and ability to apply it to significant problems and issues depends on how it was taught to students. Improvement of the overall performance of students both male and female in private schools should be desired by proprietors and educational institutions that pilot the affairs of education in Nigeria. In the light of the above and based on the findings on the assessment of performance levels of private school students in Economics in the senior school certificate examination (SSCE) in Ebonyi State, 'Nigeria: 2016/2017 to 2020/2021 School Years. It would be concluded that students in urban private schools performed better in senior school certificate Economics examination relative to their counterparts in rural areas of Ebonyi State, with the male students scoring more credits than the female students.

6.1 Recommendations

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

- i The teachers of Economics should actively involve students in the learning process for better performance.
- ii The authorities of private schools should provide economics teachers' the opportunities to attend in service courses, seminars and workshops for teaching of economics in secondary schools.
- iii The proprietors of private schools should collaborate with NGOs and the government to ensure gender equality in teaching and learning for a better performance of the girl child in external examination.

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