Are the Internal Selection Examinations Justified? Rethinking The Prediction of Students' Academic
Performance Using Ordinary-Level Credit Passes

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Abstract: Obtaining high grades in ordinary ('O') level school subjects is assumed to guarantee success and higher academic performance in post-secondary schooling. However, in the circumstance of prevalent examination malpractices that are bedeviling the external assessment systems, the expected positive correlation between the 'O' level school certificate grades and academic performance in post-secondary institutions become questionable. Hence, internal selection examinations are suggested as additional options to be used. Using a descriptive survey design and correlation analysis, we studied the academic performances of 140 students at the College of Education, Agbor, Nigeria. We found a significant positive relationship between their year one academic performance and their results in the internally conducted selection examinations. Contrarywise, we found a significant negative relationship between their results in the external 'O' level certificate examinations and their year one results. These findings indicate that students' academic performance could be predicted by their results in the internal selection examinations as expected, unlike their results in the external certificate examinations. We argue that for the selection of candidates for admission into the Colleges of Education, internal selection/elimination tests should be

strictly employed and not as an option until the menace of examination malpractice is curbed to an insignificant minimum.

Keywords: Academic performance, College of Education, Correlation, Examination malpractice, External and internal selection examinations.

Introduction

T he current reviews of education delivery in Nigeria are geared towards achieving the sustainable development goal of providing quality education for all and at all levels, from pre-primary to tertiary level of schooling. The latest national policy on education stipulates that teachers should be prepared for each level of education and equipped with the competence to deliver quality teaching in the contemporary knowledge-driven society.

(Federal Republic of Nigeria, [15]) An aspect of teacher preparation that has attracted attention is the selection of candidates for admission into tertiary institutions to produce competent teachers. Updating the admission requirements in teacher preparation institutions topped the important areas of concern in the reviewed national teacher education policy (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), [14]). For the admission requirement, the reviewed policy stated as follows." *To produce quality teachers, admission and graduation requirements for teacher education programmes need to be reviewed, to improve the caliber of both entrants and graduates." p-15.* There is a general criticism of the criteria for admitting candidates into all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, including Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnic, and Colleges of Education (Onebunne,[39]). Tertiary institutions admit students who have successfully completed their secondary education to earn ordinary level (O'level) certificates. The criticism resulted partly from the current experience of poor quality of graduates from tertiary institutions (Okoro & Ezeonwumelu, [36]; Adewale & Adhuze, [4]) and partly from the prevalent wave of examination malpractice (Onyibe et al, [41]; Adewale & Adhuze,[4]; (Jacob,[20]) Stakeholders in education are concerned that the widespread examination malpractices recorded from the external examination bodies render the validity of the grades obtained and the corresponding entry qualifications questionable (Onebunne, [39]). The external examination bodies and the certificates they offer to the entrants into the tertiary institutions are as follows. West African Examination Council (WAEC) offers West African Senior School Certificate (WASSC) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) for external candidates. National Examination Council NECO) offers Senior School Certificates (SSC). The National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) offers National Business and Technical Certificate (NBTC), National Business Certificate NBC),

and National Technical Certificate NTC). These are secular O'level certificates. Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, JAMB organizes the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) to provide entrants into tertiary institutions with a score that serves as an entry requirement for admission, in addition to the O'level certificates. The question is: Are the entry qualifications significantly predicting academic success in tertiary institutions? Some studies have shown that these entry qualifications are not significantly predicting the academic performance of students in the institutions. (Umar,[49]; Kennedy & Ebuwa, [23]; Adewale & Adhuze,[4]; Umeoduagu, [50]; Jacob,[20]). However, some research findings have indicated a significant positive relationship between the entry qualifications (with the 'O'level grades obtained in one sitting) and students' academic performances in various subjects in tertiary institutions (Abdulhakeem,[1]; Mohammed et al.,[28]; Adeyemi,[5]) In some cases, a negative correlation between the entry grades and academic performance was found (Memory et al, [27]; Babalola,[11]).

Some other studies have compared the relative strength of the various O'level certificates as correlates of the academic performance of higher education students and found the grades from WAEC stronger correlate than NECO or NABTEB grades. (Adamu,[3]; Adeyemi, [5]). In response to the criticisms, the post- UTME (PUTME) was approved in 2005 as an additional selection test organized internally by individual tertiary institutions (Kennedy and Ebuwa, [23]). Another internal mode of admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the preparatory programme that offers intensive coaching to students who did not meet the cut-off scores for their desired courses. They are termed "pre-degree" in the Universities or "pre-NCE" in the Colleges of Education. They are also regarded as remedial programmes if it accommodates students with deficiencies in their acceptable entry qualifications for admission into an institution. (Temitope, [47]). The performance of students in these preparatory programmes is a strong predictor of the academic performance of students in the Universities, as seen in the study by Joe et al. ([22]). These internal and external modes of admission into tertiary institutions are recognized in Nigeria's higher or tertiary education policy. Consequently, the admission guideline for the Early Childhood Care and Education course in the Colleges of Education (ECCE), which is the focus of this study, included all the modes and stipulates as follows. *"A Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSC) or G.C.E. 'O' level with credits in four subjects (including English language and Mathematics) at no more than two sittings…All candidates wishing to be considered for admission must write and pass the selection examination organized by JAMB. Successful candidates in the pre-NCE examination who take and succeed in the selection examination organized by JAMB are also qualified for admission. It should be noted that colleges, in addition to all*

of the above, should administer their own qualifying tests and interviews. This is legitimate" p-2, 41. (National Commission for Colleges of Education,NCCE, [29]) In this study, the relationship between the student's academic performance in the college and their grades in both the internal selection examinations and external 'o' level grades was surveyed.

Early Childhood Care and Education in Colleges of Education

The current national policy on education emphasizes the preparation of teachers for each of the levels (Pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary) of education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), [15]). Consequently, the School of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) was established in all Colleges of Education (COE) to prepare teachers for the primary and pre-primary levels. In the selection process, the cut-off scores for admission into tertiary institutions are lower for the Colleges of Education than the Universities. However, there is the observation that the teacher preparation courses attract the residue of entrants into the tertiary institutions after the best and better candidates have been selected for other courses. This manifests in dwindling enrolment in programmes for teacher preparation in tertiary institutions. (Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), [48]; Onyedinefu, [40]; JAMB[21] ; Akindutire & Ekundayo,[10]). The available slots for education departments are hardly filled up by applicants for admission. Only 53,612 out of 111,601 slots for education departments were filled up in the 2022 admission process, as against 81,653 applicants for 8 529 slots in law. (Kevwe[24],). Similarly, there is growing apathy for Colleges of Education among entrants into tertiary institutions (Okwelle, [37]; Ezeh, [13]; Aina & Ayodele, [9]; Okah, [34]). Furthermore, there is also a concern that within the College of Education system, the ECCE programme does not attract many candidates to produce an adequate number of teachers required for that level of education. (Sooter, [46]; Owojiri & Gbenga-Akanmu, [43]; Obiweluozor, [32\; Osho, Aliyu, Okolie, & Onifade,[42]; Okeke, [35; Nwanekezi & Onyekara, [30]]) Therefore, candidates for admission into ECCE departments are sourced from the internal preliminary/remedial courses and the few who could not get admission into other departments due to deficiency in their entry qualifications. Consequently, students of ECCE are admitted from all the modes of entry as stipulated in the admission requirement (NCCE, [27]). This spread made the comparison of the students' academic performances across all the entry requirements within each department feasible, as done in this study.

Admission criteria

Generally, admission criteria for institutions of learning mean the specified minimum qualifications a student must possess to be accepted into the institution.

They are carefully determined as foundations that can guarantee success for a candidate in a particular course of study. Other terms used to describe them include admission requirements, entry requirements, entry qualifications, and admission guidelines. Admission requirements are used to compare and select candidates who will most likely benefit from the learning experiences offered in an institution. Education requires a sound mental capacity of the learner. Admission requirements ensure that students with the requisite mental capacity to succeed during their studies are admitted. The academic performance of a learner in previous stages of studies is expected to predict future performances in related studies. Hence the setting of admission requirements is leveraged on the learners' performances in previous stages of study.

In Nigeria, the stages of study run from early childhood education through senior secondary to tertiary education. (FME, 2014). The transition to the tertiary level depends on the performance of a learner at the senior secondary level. The performance at the end of the secondary school level is described by the grades obtained in the various subjects chosen by the learner that are compiled in the 'ordinary' level certificates issued by the examination bodies. These examination bodies like WAEC, NECO, and NABTEB are external to both secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Prior to 1978, each tertiary institution administers separate selection tests in addition to the external examinations stated earlier, to generate admission criteria. In 1978, the external examination board, JAMB, took over the administration of general selection testing for all the Universities and subsequently for all tertiary institutions. From the inception of JAMB, the general minimum admission criteria had been five (5) 'O' level credit passes at one or two sittings including English language and Mathematics, and a score of not less than 200 (out of 400) from the UTME for Universities and 150 (out of 400) for Polytechnics', Colleges of Education, and Monotechnic. (Memory et al, [27]). In 2005, each tertiary institution started organizing an additional internal selection test, the post-UTME (PUTME) as part of the admission criteria. With the introduction of computer-based tests in the UTME, the minimum score for universities is 140 while that of other tertiary institutions is 100 in addition to the 'O' level credit passes make up the admission criteria in terms of cognitive achievement. There are other non-cognitive aspects of the criteria like a minimum age of 16 years which are not the focus of this study. Other modes of entry into the institutions like pre-degree and pre-NCE apply but the admissions are also regularized by JAMB in very formal ways after they have been certified as successful at the end of the remedial programme. However, the assessment of the candidates in the two modes is totally internal as stated earlier. This study seeks to ascertain the extent to which the internal and external entry

qualifications correlate with the students' academic performance during their studies.

Academic performance

Academic performance describes the learning achievement of an individual or a group at the end of a learning experience or academic programme. It indicates a student's capabilities from which his/her potential could be inferred. At any level, it is used to determine the ability of a learner to assimilate, retain, and communicate knowledge learned. At all levels of schooling, students' academic performance is an important metric for rating an academic institution. (Alyahyan & Dustegor,[7]). Hence institutions strive to achieve students' high academic performances by selecting/admitting candidates using standard admission requirements. There are varieties of indices of academic performance. The cognitive component of academic performance is commonly measured with raw scores and composite scores. For tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the composite score, Grade Point Average (GPA) is used to measure academic performance at the end of a semester or year of study. It is the average of all the grades and points obtained by a student in all the required courses within a semester or year of study for an academic programme. For the whole period of studying in a particular academic programme, it is known as the cumulative grade point average (CGPA). At the college of education level, the computation of GPA takes into account all the compulsory courses, required courses, and electives to the stipulated number of units for the semester/session. (NCCE, [29]). In this study, the GPA is used as a measure of academic performance as recognized and used in previous studies (Umar, [49]; Memory et al, [27]; York et al, [52])

Relationship between entry qualifications and academic performance

Numerous studies have been carried out on the relationship between the academic performance of students and their entry qualifications in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The entry qualifications include 'O' level grades obtained from external examination bodies like WAEC, NECO, and NABTEB, total scores obtained from UTME and PUTME, and results of pre-degree or pre-NCE internal examinations Some of them are carried out in the universities (Abdulhakeem,[1]; Umar, [49]; Kennedy & Ebuwa, [23]; Oche, [33]; Babalola,[11]; Adeyemi, [5]; Gbore,[17]; Obioma & Salau, [31]). Some are carried out in the college of education, polytechnics, and similar colleges (Memory et al, [27]; Adamu, [3]; Adewale & Adhuze, [3], Umeoduagu, [50]; Jacob, [20]). A further review of the studies showed that a significant positive relationship was found between the entry qualifications from internal examination results like probation course results (Memory et al,[27]),

GPA from NCE results (Umeoduagu, [50]), pre-degree and PUTME results (Joe et al, [22]; Gbore,[17]), pre-NCE results (Salihu et al, [44]) and academic performance. The results of large-scale studies indicated low predictive validity of public examinations (like WASSCE, SSCE, UTME, and NBCE/NTCE) for students' university achievement. (Obioma & Salau,[31];

Adeyemi, [5]). The findings from these large-scale studies which cut across tertiary institutions revealed that among all the public examinations, WASSCE was the best predictor of university students' academic success while NBCE/NTCE.is the least predictor.

In comparison, the public (or external) entry qualifications like UTME do not seem to correlate positively and significantly with the internal entry qualifications like PUTME (Oche, [33]) while students' performances in internal qualifying examinations like pre-degree and PUTME correlate significantly and positively (Gbore, [17]). These results elicited recommendations that preference should be given to candidates who scored higher in the internal PUTME in admission while denying admission to those who scored high in UTME and low in PUTME (Oche,[33] and an overhauling of the public examination system in Nigeria. (Adewale & Adhuze, [4]). Researchers tend to interpret these results as an offshoot of the prevalent examination malpractices in the country Onyibe et al, [41].

There are no previous similar studies in early childhood care and education and this study aim to fill the gap.

Examination malpractices and external entry qualifications

Since the past five decades, widespread examination malpractice has bedeviled the conduct of external/public examinations in Nigeria, (Olajire,[38]), which started as 'EXPO'70 in WASSCE' in the 1970s. Subsequently, reports of examination malpractice in all public examinations (which are external to the full-time school system), at

State, local, and school/examination center levels, occupy media spaces annually (Iroegbu, [19]; Edeh, [12]). Media reports like the following abound. *" Bauchi, Borno, Kano top NECO list of examination malpractice…"(*Ahmad,[8])*. "Over 20,000 students are involved in exam malpractice, says NECO'* (Abe,[2]) *" WAEC, NECO accuse 20 secondary schools, 23 teachers of exam malpractice in Bayelsa"* (Lawal, [25]). *"UTME 2020: List of top 5 States with examination malpractice in Nigeria"* (Lawal, [26]). *"Kogi tops list of States with high exam malpractice rates in WASSCE"* (Harolds, [18]).

The scenario of the experience of this menace shows that the officers in the examination bodies, schools, private proprietors, teachers, supervisors/invigilators,

students, and even parents encourage and empower examination malpractice at all levels. It has given birth to *"Miracle Examination Centres" which are described as "rogue"* schools that aid students to cheat in public examinations (Agwu et al, [6]). Examination malpractice in Nigeria has been blamed on inordinate desperation to obtain 'O' level certificates and other entry-qualifying results which are critical documents for proceeding to acquire higher education. Onyibe et al ([41]) blamed it on the government's lack of political will to implement the punishment due to offenders according to the law. In Nigeria, a section of decree 20 of 1984 stipulated 21 years imprisonment without the option of fine for those found guilty of examination malpractice (FRN, [16]). A variety of solutions have been suggested including the use of computer-based tests (CBT) (Showunmi, [45]) It thrives with intense force despite the government laws which are aimed to punish offenders severely. The striking effect is that grades earned by students from these examinations seem unreliable as entry qualifications for higher education in the country. A further seeming effect is the relatively falling standard of education which is manifesting in the poor academic quality of graduates of tertiary institutions.

In recent times it is common for a student to obtain more than the minimum 5 credit passes (like 8 to 10 credit passes) from these public examinations but fails to pass the UTME or PUTME to gain admission into the university. They fall back on the lower tertiary education, like colleges of education for admission. We observe the poor academic performance of these students with very high 'O' level grades. We deem it necessary to study the relationship between these spuriously high entry qualifications and academic performance at the college of education level to provide more empirical information to guide the efforts to secure lasting solutions to the problems in the nation's education sector.

The context of the study

The internally conducted entrance examination for candidates seeking admission into the college of Education, Agbor (Delta State of Nigeria) was introduced in the 2004/2005 sessions. It was aimed at ensuring that the right caliber of students who would benefit from the academic programme for the award of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) are admitted into the College. In the time past admission was done through any of the following criteria.

(i) Obtaining a list of successful candidates (who made the College their first choice) in the external examination UTME conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

(ii) Admitting students, who hold at least five credit passes in ordinary ('O') level subjects, directly into various departments where their results are relevant, without any examination (oral or written).

(iii) Admitting students who completed the pre-NCE programme of the college successfully by obtaining a GPA that is not less than the cut-off GPA as determined by the Academic Board.

The pre-NCE programme is a remedial academic organized for students who did not have the minimum entry requirement for direct admission into the NCE programme. The pre-NCE students study ordinary-level level subjects and are examined at the end of each semester. At the end of the period of study, their grade point average (GPA) for all the courses they studied was computed for each student and used to admit them into the first year of the NCE programme if they meet the cut-off GPA as determined by the Academic Board.

For each of these methods, the successful candidates are further screened in their respective departments to ascertain the genuineness of their certificates and results and the relevance of these results to departmental requirements as specified by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

The internally conducted selection examination was introduced in response to the increasing wave of examination malpractices recorded in the conduct of the external examinations in addition to a current rise in the overall poor performance of students and graduates of the colleges discussed earlier in this paper. To eliminate the factor of poor entry qualification, in the achievement of students admitted into the programmes, the College introduced the internally conducted entrance examination in line with the position of NCCE ([29]) which was existing since 2002. It is expected that the entry qualifications obtained from the internally conducted selection examinations should be effective predictors of students' performance in the NCE programme.

Against this background, this study was undertaken to determine the extent to which this expectation is achieved in the early stage of the introduction of the selection examination in 2004/2005. The objective of this study is to produce answers to the following questions:

Research questions

1. What is the relationship between the year one students' Cumulative Grade point Average (CGPA) and:

i.   Their scores in the entrance examination? ii.   Their pre- NCE Grade Point Average (GPA)

iii. The number of 'O' level credit passes with which they were admitted?

2. To what extent is their performance in their first-year examination predicted by their performance in: i.   The entrance examination,

ii.   The pre- NCE programme.,

iii.   The 'O' level examinations?

Methodology

The ex-post facto research design was employed since the variables of the study had occurred and were not manipulated in this study. The population of the study is the 140 students who were admitted in the 2004/2005 session in the Primary Education Studies (PES) Department. The session was purposively chosen as the first period of the use of internal selection examination to admit students into the college. The PES department, in the school of ECCE, has students who take courses in five (out of six) schools of the college (i.e. Sciences, Arts and Social Science, Languages, Education, and School of Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE).

The records in the PES department are also more accessible to the authors since the corresponding author belongs to the PES department and was the head of the department at the time of data collection. This facilitated the use of documents in the department for data collection.

Out of the 140 students, 96 of them were admitted through the entrance examination conducted by the College while 44 were admitted through the pre- NCE programme. They formed the sample for this study using a total population sampling method.

Data were collected from the records in the registration files of the students and result files in the PES department. The data comprised the following:

i.   The cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) obtained at the end of year one. This is the dependent variable (Y).

ii.   The scores in the entrance examination conducted in the College (X_1).

iii.   The grade–point average (GPA) obtained from the pre-NCE programme X_2

iv.   The number of credit- passes with which they were admitted X_3.

Table 1. Correlation between entrance examination scores, (X1) and year one cumulative grade point Average Y

Measures	X_1	Y

	Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)	1.000	0.429**
X_1	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	96	96
	Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)	0.429**	1.000
Y	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	96	96

** Correlation coefficient, r is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Each student who did not pass through the pre- NCE programme had values for X_1 and X_3. They were admitted through the entrance examination conducted by the college. Those who passed through the pre- NCE programme had values for X_2 only. They were deficient in the 'O' level credit passes, hence they were not used in admitting them into the college.

To answer research question 1, correlation coefficients were computed between the values of the CGPA (Y) of the students and their entrance examination scores (X_1), values of their pre-NCE GPA, (X_2), and the number of credit passes (X_3) with which they were admitted.
Simple linear regression analysis was done to answer question 2 since the variables are continuous type. SPSS was used to carry out the analyses. The results in Table 1 showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the entrance examination scores and the cumulative grade point average, $r(94)=.429$, $p=.000<.05$.

Table 2. *Linear regression of entrance examination scores X_1 on year one cumulative grade point average Y*

Model 1/Sources of variances	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.

Regression	14.997	1	14.997	20.54	0.000**
Residual	66.528	95	0.700		
Total	81.525	96			

a. Predictor X_1 b. Dependent Variable Y R^2=.655, R=.806

The result in Table 2 showed that the overall regression was statistically significant, R^2=.655, F (1,95) =20.54, p=.000<.05. Hence the entrance examination scores significantly predicted the students' year one CGPA and accounted for about 65.5% in the CGPA.

Table 3. Correlation between the pre- N.C.E Grade Point Average (CGPA=X2) and year one Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA=Y)

	Measures	X_3	X
	Pearson Correlation coefficient, (r)	1.000	0.697**
X_3	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	44	44
	Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)	0.697**	1.000
X	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	0.697**
	N	44	44

 **Correlation is Significant at 0. 001. df=42

The results in Table 3 showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the pre-NCE CGPA and the year one CGPA, r (42) =.70, p=.000<.05. This implies that students who had high grades in the pre-NCE course also had high grades in their year one course.

Table 4. Linear regression of pre-NCE CGPA (X2) on year one cumulative grade point average

Model 1/Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	16.022	1	16.022	39.695	.000**
Residual	16.952	43	.385		
Total	32.974	44			

a. Predictor X_2 b. Dependent Variable Y, $R^2=.697$, R=.834.

The results in Table 4 showed that the overall regression was significant $R^2=.834$, F $(1, 43) = 39.70$, p=.000<.05. Hence the pre-NCE CGPA significantly predicted the students' year one CGPA and accounted for about 83% in the CGPA.

Table 5. Correlation between the number of 'O' level credit passes(X3) and year one CGPA(Y)

Variable	Measures	X_3	Y
	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	1.000	-.251*
X_3	Sig. (2- tailed)		.015
	N	96	96
	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	-.251*	1.000
Y	Sig. (2- tailed)	.015	
	N	96	96

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) df=94

The results displayed in Table 5 indicates that there was a significant negative correlation between the number of 'O' level credit passes and year one CGPA, r (94) =-.251, p=.015<.05. This implies that the higher the number of credit passes, the lower the CGPA.

Table 6. Linear regression of the number of 'O' level credit passes (X3) on year one cumulative grade point average
(Y)

Model 1/Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.141	1	5.141	6.125	0.015
Residual	76.384	95	.804		
Total	81.525	96			

a Predictor X_3 b. Dependent variable Y, R^2=.501, R=.708.

The results in Table 6 shows that number of credit passes significantly and negatively predicted the year one CGPA of the students.

Table 7. Correlation between the number of 'O' level credit passes and scores in the entrance examination.

Variable	Measures	X_1	X_3
	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	1.000	- 0.070
X_1	Sig. (2- tailed)		.504
	N	96	96
	Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)	-0.070	1.000
X_3	Sig. (2-tailed)	.504	
	N	96	96

df=94

Table 7 shows that there was a negative correlation between the number of credit passes and the scores in the entrance examination, r (94)=.-.07, p= .504>.05. But the correlation is not statistically significant. However, the result implies that the students who possessed a higher number of credit passes had lower scores in the entrance examination like the pattern of the year one CGPA.

Discussion of   results

There was a significant positive relationship between the academic performance of the students used in this study, and their entry requirements, which were obtained from internal assessment procedures. But there was a significant negative relationship between the academic performance of the students and their entry qualification that was obtained from external assessments conducted by public examination bodies. These were the results for the research question1. The results portray the reality that is experienced in tertiary institutions in Nigeria which necessitated the approval to include internally conducted selection tests for admission. These internal assessment procedures the entrance examination and session examination of pre-NCE students are conducted by the college under a strict and conducive environment.

The results corroborate the findings that there was a significant positive relationship between academic performance and probation course results (Memory et al,[27]); GPA from NCE results (Umeoduagu, [50]); pre-degree and PUTME results (Joe et al, [20]; Gbore, [17]); and pre-NCE results (Salihu et al, [44]) from internal examinations.

There is a significant negative correlation between the performance of the students and the number of credit passes that they obtained from external examinations conducted by bodies accredited for issuing such grades. This trend is not expected but it is the real situation experienced in the College system at present. Students possess entry qualifications of more than 8 credit passes and are expelled for an academic deficiency after the year one examinations. They are like the results obtained by Memory et al ([27]) and Babalola ([11]) that indicated a significant negative relationship between academic performance and entry qualifications from external examinations like WASSCE and SSCE. It implies that the credit passes may not be valid. Since the screening process, aimed at detecting 'fake certificates and results' freed the students to go ahead with their studies, we argue that these credit passes might have been obtained through cheating in the external examinations. As stated earlier, the results from the popular external examination bodies have been facing the problem of doubtful credibility. (Abe, [2]; Lawal, [26]; [25]; Harolds, [18]; Onyibe et al, [41]). The prevalent examination malpractice is a likely explanation for the unexpected inverse relationship between the number of credit passes possessed by students and their performance in the NCE programme as obtained in this study as observed by Wangare &Simwa ([51]).. The inverse relationship between the number of credit passes possessed by students on entry into the college and their academic performance in the programme justified the

introduction of the internal selection entrance examination for admission into the colleges as practiced at present.

The results for research question 2 indicated that both the entrance examination scores and pre-NCE GPA significantly predicted the students' academic performance in the programme unlike their 'O' level grades from public examinations. The results corroborate those of Obioma & Salau ([31]) and Adeyemi ([5]) that concluded that the results from public examinations are lower predictors of academic performance than the results from internal examinations in tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the negative relationship between the entrance examination scores and the number of credit passes prior to the students' admission into the college buttresses the argument above. Similar results were obtained between the scores obtained in UTME and the PUTME that was internally conducted by some Nigerian Universities (Oche, [33]). Oche ([33]) also concluded on the basis of the finding that the introduction of PUTME tests/screening exercise conducted internally by respective institutions was justified. The result of this study which showed that students with a higher number of credit passes from WAEC and similar examination bodies are not high achievers in the college, projects a serious problem in the performance of the students. This could account for the observed prevalence of poor-quality college graduates as stated earlier (Adewale & Adhuze, [4]; Okoro & Ezeonwumelu [36]). Given these results, the revision of the admission requirements in the national policy for teacher education (FME,[14]) is justified. However, we contend that the implementation of the reviewed policy is adversely affected by the current reliance on the general use of the external entry requirements for admission in tertiary institutions. This has sustained the current criticism of the admission criteria (Onebunne, [39]). For the colleges of education, the proviso that "colleges…should administer their qualifying tests and interviews" (NCCE, [29]) attests to the contention against total reliance on external qualifying examinations. The results of this study give credence to the focus on internal qualifying tests and criteria for colleges and all tertiary institutions to admit the right caliber of students who could benefit from their programmes. This is expected to guarantee the production of highly skilled manpower required to drive and sustain the development of the nation.

Conclusion

Valid entry qualification is a strong positive correlate of achievement in academic programmes as seen in this study. When the entry qualification is not valid, the reverse is the case as seen in this study also. Therefore, there is a necessity for credible examination bodies in the certification of students at the secondary level of

teaching. The grades in the certificates issued by examining bodies should be much more than letters and numbers. Their validity requires that they represent to a large extent the level of cognition possessed by examinees.

The production of an adequate number of teachers of early childhood and care education for the nation from colleges of education is enhanced by the multiple modes of admission which include the internal selection tests. Based on the results of this study, emphasis should be placed on the admission of candidates through the remedial pre-NCE programme and college entrance examinations that are significantly predictive of the academic performance of the students.

It is considered criminal and an offense to humanity when candidates parade certificates that are not valid and become frustrated eventually since they cannot defend their certificates. They are withdrawn from tertiary institutions for academic deficiency or inability to cope with academic work. The recommendation of researchers to overhaul the present examination bodies to make them credible in the Nigerian education system is upheld in this study. However, the present innovative approach of employing computer-based testing (CBT) for internally conducted entrance examinations is supported. Making it the final means of selecting candidates for admission into the tertiary institution should be encouraged till the eradication of the menace of examination malpractice. But a more permanent solution to the problem of malpractice in the evaluation of students' achievement in both internal and external examinations, probably with CBT, should be instituted for the selection of candidates for admission.

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