

**PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAUSES OF LOW ENTRIES AND POOR PERFORMANCE
IN SCIENCE SUBJECTS AT THE WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATION (WASSCE) IN THE GAMBIA (1998 – 2001)**

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the causes of low entries and poor performance of Gambian students in science subjects at the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) from 1998 to 2001. Students' entries in the science subjects have been relatively low vis-à-vis the Art subjects. It has therefore been imperative to find out the factors responsible for such low entries and poor performance. To this end, 14 Principals of Senior Secondary Schools, 12 WASSCE Examiners, 36 Science Teachers and 141 Grade 12 science students were selected by stratified random sampling to form the survey group.

Two focus group discussions were also conducted. Eleven students (6 science and 5 non-science) and 8 science teachers purposively drawn from 4 Senior Secondary Schools participated in the focus group discussions. Data for the survey was obtained from respondents' views and analysed by the use of percentages.

Data obtained from the focus groups was analysed qualitatively. The results showed that science subjects are not as popular as the other subjects. In addition, the poor performance in science subjects was perceived to be due to lack of laboratory facilities, lack of competent science teachers, inability of students to purchase the relevant textbooks, and over ambitious syllabus. The findings obtained from the focus group discussion further buttressed the views expressed by participants in the survey.

It was recommended among others that the Senior Secondary Schools should be provided with adequate science laboratory facilities, and science teachers should be provided with incentives in order to reverse the situation.