

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WASSCE CORE SUBJECTS FROM 2016 TO 2020

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Today, the ever-growing focus on equal access to quality education in policy proposals for education in Ghana is glaring, following the recent spike in the number of policies designed from September 2017. Ghana's recent history has been characterized by increasing focus on equal access to quality education for Ghanaian children, reflected in the various policy interventions crafted to support outcomes for students and families, especially for those who are historically disadvantaged and underserved. This is in recognition of education's outsized role in national development and how it can bridge inequalities and level out life outcomes.

In September 2017, Ghana began to implement an 'extended basic education' system which makes senior high school (SHS) education free and inclusive. For policy formulators, a number of contexts underlined the design and implementation of this free, inclusive education regime. These include a perennial weak transition problem (especially for pupils from basic education to secondary), imbalances in education access, the need to fight poverty and crime and stimulate improved civic life, health and living conditions as well as economic growth for the people of Ghana. In respect of weak transition for instance, from the 2010/11 to 2016/17 academic years, out of a total of 4,000,000 pupils who started primary school, only 500,000 students were enrolled in senior high education (Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, 2010-2017), indicating that a significant majority of students (i.e., 3,500,000 students) could not gain access to senior high school. The BECE 'stanine' norm-referenced grading system, built on a highly 'selective' modality, had played a long-standing part in compounding the problem of limited access to secondary education, year on year. Further, it is apparent from the 2012/13 and 2016/17 Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) data that substantial inequities in access to education exist across the various wealth quintiles, with students coming from the poorest 20% of households at an acute disadvantage when it comes to accessing secondary education. Despite the obvious justifications, the roll out of the Free SHS policy was met with disquiet in certain quarters, with some critics arguing that it would lead to a compromise in the quality of education on offer to Ghanaian children.

On the back of these concerns, it has become necessary to examine and compare the performance of the first graduates produced under the Free SHS policy to previous years' performances, particularly the academic year preceding the implementation of the policy. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the percentage of candidates obtaining the tertiary education qualifying grades (TEQG) (A1-C6) in the WASSCE core subjects in the past five years.

Table I: Percentage of candidates obtaining the tertiary education qualifying grades (TEQG) (A1-C6) in the WASSCE core subjects from 2016 to 2020

	NO. OF STDS WHO SAT	ENG	MATH	SCI	SSTD
2016 ¹	274,263	53.2	32.8	48.5	54.5
2017	289,207	54	42.7	43.7	52.3
2018	316,999	46.8	38.3	50.5	73.3
2019	346,098	49	65	63.2	75.4
2020	375,763	57.3	65.7	52.5	64.3

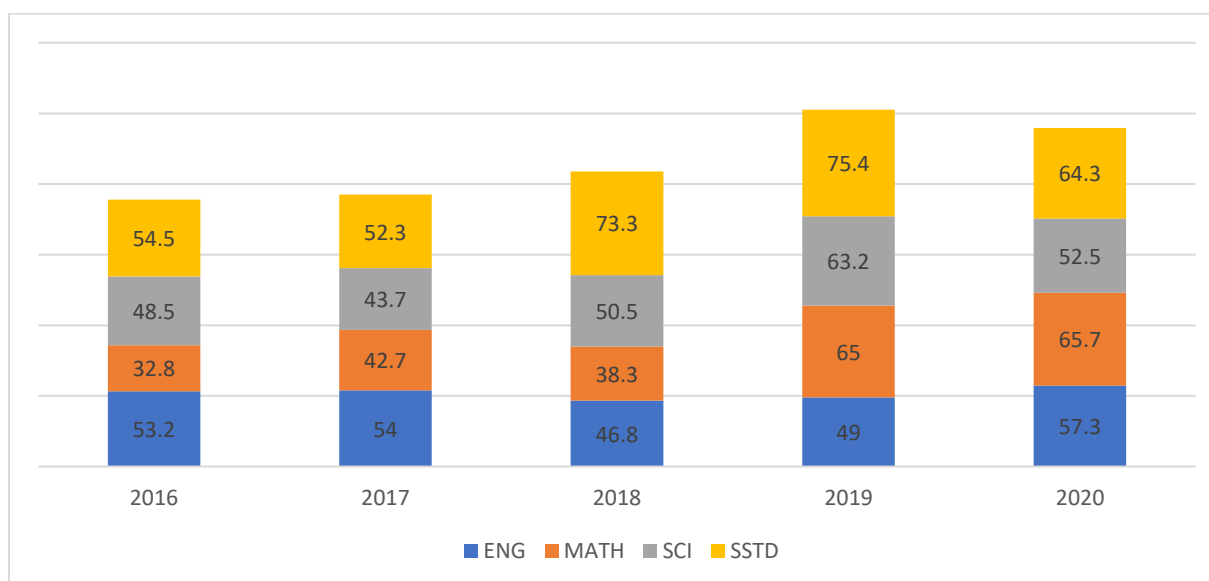


Figure I: Percentage of candidates obtaining the tertiary education qualifying grades (TEQG) (A1-C6) in the WASSCE core subjects from 2016 to 2020

With regard to the percentage of candidates obtaining the tertiary education qualifying grades (TEQG) (A1-C6) in the core subjects, this year's WASSCE results is one of the best in the last five years. Comparing the percentage of candidates obtaining the TEQG (A1-C6) in the WASSCE core subjects in the past five years, it can be observed that the greatest improvement was in mathematics. The percentage of candidates making the TEQG in mathematics (the most dreaded subject in the curriculum) increased from 32% in 2016 to more than double this number (i.e. approximately 66%) in 2020. Also, mathematics recorded the highest percentage increase (9.43%) of candidates obtaining a Grade A1, while English Language recorded a marginal percentage increase (0.6%) of candidates obtaining a Grade A1. Furthermore, the proportion of candidates making the TEQG in all four core subjects exceeded 50% in the last two years (i.e. 2019 and 2020). This means a little

¹ Data for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are based on the provisional results released by WAEC each year which are available online.

over half of the candidates taking the WASSCE in the last two years obtained the tertiary education qualifying grades (A1-C6).

It is very interesting to note that these major improvements in WASSCE are happening at the time when the entry requirements for entry into SHS have been reduced drastically from the BECE qualifying aggregate of 30 to as low as aggregate 52² due to the inclusive free SHS initiative. More importantly, this year’s exam, written under the pall of the Covid-19 global pandemic was in and of itself a unique event. No other graduating class in our history, it can be argued, has had to undertake their final examinations under the extreme physical and psychological conditions that these brave young children did. The results are, therefore, clear manifestations that the government’s interventions aimed at ensuring Ghanaian youth access an inclusive and equitable quality SHS education as well as attain better learning outcomes are working. For mathematics, in particular, the improvement is a ‘manifesto commitment’ fulfilled. It can be argued that Ghana has reached a stage where half of its youth have tertiary education qualifying grade in mathematics or numerate, placing the country on the path to becoming a mathematics friendly nation.

The line graph of the data (Figure 2), show how the results of the core subjects have improved in the last five years.

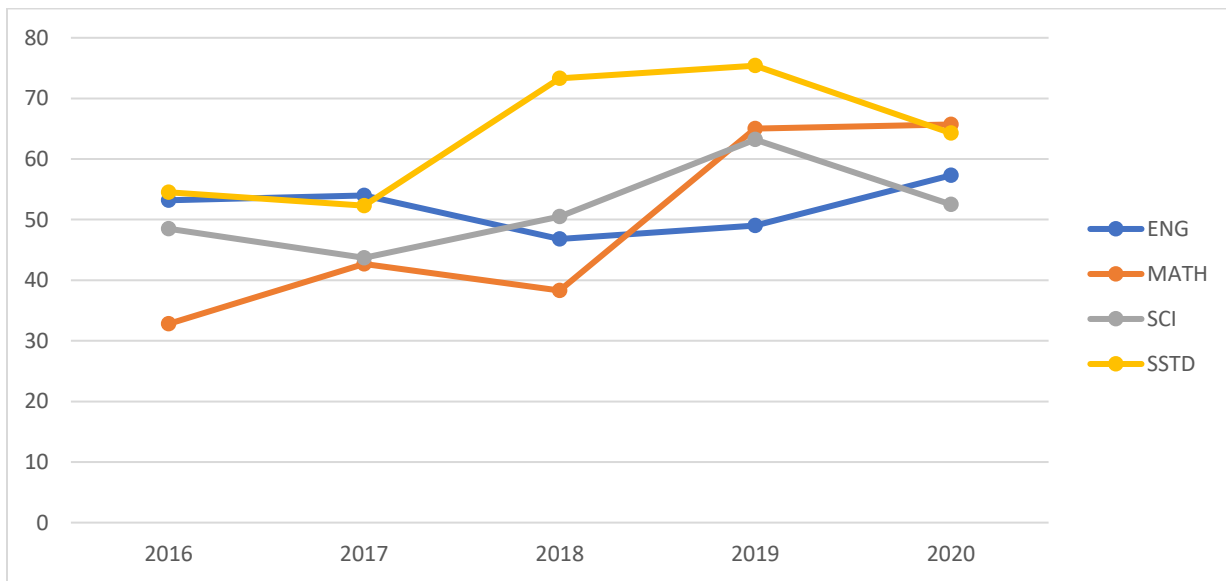


Figure 2: Percentage of candidates obtaining the tertiary education qualifying grades (TEQG) (A1-C6) in the WASSCE core subjects from 2016 to 2020

The percentage of candidates making the TEQG in Social Studies increased from 54.5% in 2016 to 64.3% in 2020, showing a 10 percentage point improvement. Similarly, there have been some

² That is, not obtaining a Grade 9 in English Language and Mathematics (2017/2018 admission year).

improvements in Integrated Science and English Language. These results suggest about 50% of the approximately 342,500 candidates who wrote the WASSCE, which is over 150,000, are likely to qualify for tertiary education (i.e. obtain the Grades A1-C6 in their best six subjects including the English, Mathematics and Integrated Science).

The analysis shows that the 2020 WASSCE performance is up to standard and compares well with the 2019 performance. On average, the 2020 performance shows a 12.7 percentage increase from the 2016 performance for all four core subjects. It is therefore evidential that the 2020 performance is a remarkable one compared to the 2016 performance (the year preceding the implementation of the Free SHS). In sum, this year's performance, like any other performance in the past three years, continues to dispel the concern of a compromised education quality as far as students' performance is concerned.

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