

Impact of the Duration of Semester Examinations on Students' Academic Performance in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the impact of the duration of semester examinations on academic performance among students in four colleges of education in North Central Nigeria. A stratified sampling technique was applied to select 200 participants from the four Colleges of Education in the North-Central Zone of Nigeria (FCT COE Zuba, FCE Okene, COE Minna, and COE Akwanga). The four colleges of education were stratified based on location, and a proportional number of students were randomly selected from each stratum. The research employed a combination of focus group interview, questionnaires and examination scores to collect relevant data. Subsequently, the academic performance data of students from the short-duration calendar were compared to their performance data from the standard-duration calendar. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of the sample, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the mean academic performance scores across different durations of semester examinations. The outcome of the study revealed that the current 4-week duration of semester examinations is the ideal duration, while a shorter duration was rejected. Moreover, the flexibility in duration based on subject complexity was also favored. The result further indicates that the duration of semester examinations does have a significant impact on academic performance. Therefore, educational institutions are advised to adopt a flexible approach to the duration of examinations, particularly for subjects with varied complexities and volumes, to promote better academic outcomes. The findings emphasize the need for educational institutions to adhere to a four-week duration of examinations to promote better academic outcomes.

Keywords: Impact, duration, semester, examination calendar, academic performance

INTRODUCTION

It is customary in a significant number of Nigerian educational institutions for students to accomplish assignments, examinations, and projects within the designated time frame as stipulated by the curriculum. In several other countries, students are required to take a series of final examinations within a brief period, with little or no gaps in between. The successful completion of these examinations is typically a prerequisite for advancing to the next grade. The timing and scheduling of these examinations can significantly influence student performance, as evidenced by Pope and Fillmore's (2015) research, which revealed a positive correlation between examination performance and the duration of tests as well as the interval between them. However, it should be noted that exam scheduling and duration entail more than just these aspects. Other factors, such as the sequence in which examinations are conducted and the total number of exams within a specified time frame, can also have a considerable impact on examination outcomes.

The quality of instruction is a crucial factor that influences and reflects on other performance metrics in contemporary education. The transfer of knowledge, the interaction between students and educators'

academic values, and the evaluation of students after every semester are all impacted by the standard of instruction. It is widely accepted that academic standards are determined by an individual's success on both internal and external tests, which is a reflection of the quality of instruction.

It is noteworthy that examinations are an essential component of contemporary education. They serve as a yardstick to evaluate the knowledge and skills that students have acquired during instruction. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that the quality of instruction is of the highest standards to ensure that students can demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge during examinations. This notion was reaffirmed by Ajelabi (2018), who noted that in a formal educational system, students must pass an examination at every level of their study before continuing to the next. Students had essentially been sitting for exams of one kind or another from elementary school until they were admitted to the university. Nonetheless, as it might affect the levels of stress among students, performance, and readiness, the duration and sequence of examinations need to be carefully considered.

A significant area for investigation was identified by Brooks & Brooks in 1999. These scholars focused their attention on the administration of exams. They made it clear that how an examination is administered, including its duration, format, and methods, would affect how eagerly students anticipate taking it in the not-too-distant future. The short duration of the current examination may have a detrimental impact on applicants' performance and attitude, and it may deter them from eagerly anticipating future exams if it is ill-designed and executed. Research has indicated that an extended period between assessments might provide students with additional time to prepare and study, ultimately resulting in improved performance. Longer examination durations allowed students to prepare more completely and solidify their information, which in turn helped them score better, according to a study by Blessing and Olusola (2018).

On the other hand, if examinations are held closer together in a short duration, students may experience anxiety and disappointment. According to a study conducted by Nguyen and Li (2019), students who have examinations scheduled near one another and within a short duration report heightened levels of anxiety and difficulty in adequately preparing for each examination. These factors can ultimately result in poorer academic performance and lower marks for the student. Furthermore, the scheduling of examinations during the semester can also significantly impact academic achievement. Therefore, educational institutions must take into consideration the potential implications of exam scheduling on the performance of students. Students who had examinations right after each other at the end of the semester were more likely to become burned out and tired, which had a poor impact on their performance on those examinations, according to research by Zhang et al. (2020).

In brief, the duration of the semester examination schedule has a significant impact on students' academic performance. When students are given adequate time between exams to prepare and study, their chances of performing well increase significantly. Conversely, when examinations are scheduled in a condensed period, it can cause undue stress and anxiety, leading to poor performance. Therefore, the duration and scheduling of exams are crucial elements that influence students' capacity to study effectively and perform well in their examinations. There is compelling evidence to suggest that attention to these factors can profoundly impact academic outcomes.

This relationship has been explored in various studies, highlighting the importance of a well-balanced and appropriately scheduled examination calendar. According to research by Brint, and Cantwell (2010), the examination calendar should be designed in a way that allows students sufficient time for preparation and revision. A longer duration between exams can provide students with more time to study and consolidate their knowledge, thus improving their performance. On the other hand, a compressed examination calendar with exams scheduled close together can lead to heightened stress and insufficient preparation time, negatively impacting academic performance (Goulas, and Megalokonomou, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Educational institutions adhere to an academic calendar that outlines a prescribed duration for semester examinations, which may vary depending on the institution. However, the potential impact of the duration of the semester examination calendar on the academic performance of students remains unclear. There exists limited research on the plausible relationship between the duration of the semester examination calendar and student academic performance. It is of utmost importance to comprehend this relationship, considering that it could have significant implications for educational institutions in terms of scheduling and planning examinations proficiently to optimize the learning outcomes of students.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which semester examination duration impacts the academic performance of students. By analyzing the relationship between these variables, the research aims to provide valuable insights into how educational institutions can better design their examination calendars to support student success.

The study has two specific objectives.

1. To identify the optimal duration of semester examinations that promotes students' academic performance and reduces undue stress.
2. To investigate the impact of the duration of semester examinations on students' academic performance.

Research Questions

To fulfill the objectives of the study, it is necessary to address the following research questions:

- (1) What is the optimal duration of semester examinations that promotes academic success and reduces undue stress?
- (2) How does the duration of semester examinations impact students' academic performance?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis below is put out for this study on the basis of the literature already in existence:

H_0 : There is no significant impact on the duration of semester examinations on students' academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the purpose of an examination is crucial for students to assess and evaluate their academic performance and competence. As suggested by Collins and O'Brien (2011), this involves evaluating their knowledge through written or oral questions based on the syllabus within a specified time frame.

According to the Long man Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2010-207), an examination is any process to gauge performance, knowledge, or ability. Formal summative or proficiency tests conducted by organizations or examination boards are also categorized as examinations. It is worth noting that "examination" and "test" can be used interchangeably as there is no consensus on how to distinguish between them.

English Wikipedia defines an examination as a detailed investigation, the act of conducting a detailed

investigation, or a formal test of knowledge or skill in a given area. Additionally, it is a test to show the knowledge and ability of a student, essentially an assessment. Munshi, Javed, and Hussain (2012) see examination as a systematic method of assessing and appraising students' academic competencies and performance. Looking at this statement, one can deduce that examinations are designed to assess students, appraise them critically and evaluate their competencies so as to know how they perform. The researchers further posit that a proper model for examination ought to assess not only the learning, but also the teaching process.

The Collins English Dictionary defines an examination explicitly as a formal test that is taken to show knowledge or ability in a particular subject. According to Crees well et al. (2000) and the United Kingdom Higher Education Academy Grade Point Average Report (2013–2014), summative evaluation is the primary factor in determining a deserving student's academic honours, certification classification, and rank.

Duration of Semester Examination

In Nigeria, semester examinations are a crucial component of the academic assessment process at the tertiary level, including universities, colleges of education and polytechnics. Semester examinations are conducted at the end of each semester to evaluate the students' knowledge and understanding of the course material covered during that semester.

The duration of the semester examination can vary depending on the institution and the specific course being offered. Generally, the duration of a semester examination in Nigeria typically ranges from 1-3 weeks. During this period, students are required to sit for exams in each of their registered courses. The exams can take different formats, including multiple-choice questions, essay questions, practical exams, or a combination of these (Ajelabi, 2018)

The scheduling of the semester examination is usually done by the institution's academic calendar committee. They consider factors such as the duration of the semester, the number of courses, and the availability of examination venues and invigilators.

It is important to note that the duration of the semester examination is typically determined by various considerations. These include the amount of course content, assessment objectives, course level and credit load, and examination logistics.

The amount of course content covered during the semester may influence the examination's duration. In courses with extensive content, a more extended examination period may be required to adequately assess students' understanding. The examination duration is also influenced by the assessment objectives of the course. Some courses may focus more on theoretical knowledge, while others may require practical application. The duration of the examination must reflect the assessment objectives set by the course instructors (Ajelabi, 2018),

The level of the course (e.g., 100 level, 200 level, etc.) and the credit load of the course may also influence the examination duration. Higher-level courses or courses with higher credit loads may require more time to cover the required topics adequately. Lastly, the availability of examination venues, invigilators, and resources necessary for conducting the examination can also influence the duration. Institutions must ensure adequate resources and logistics are in place to conduct examinations smoothly within the given time frame.

It is worth mentioning that the duration of the semester examination in Nigeria may be subject to periodic review by the institution's academic boards or regulatory bodies to align with best practices and promote fair assessment practices. (Ajelabi, 2018)

The duration of the examination and when it is administered are significant issues in Nigerian higher education that need to be addressed. Although school handbooks usually provide a more precise date for the distribution of this material, the finalised examination schedule is usually made public one to three weeks before the start of the examinations. It's also critical to recognise that undergraduate examinations in Nigeria are extremely demanding, requiring some students to sit for up to twelve courses in a three- four-week examination period. Colleges should think about reducing the number of classes that students must attend in a single day, even though it's not always feasible to prevent scheduling conflicts, to give them enough time to study and perform effectively. It's critical to keep in mind that these examinations are designed to evaluate students' knowledge and comprehension of the subject matter and that the variables influencing this evaluation process should be carefully taken into account (Ajelabi, 2018)

Theoretical Framework:

The impact of the duration of the semester examination calendar on the academic performance of students can be examined through the lens of several theoretical frameworks. In this study, two relevant theoretical perspectives will be explored: the cognitive load theory and the self-regulated learning theory.

1. Cognitive Load Theory:

The cognitive load theory, proposed by Sweller et al. (1998), suggests that the amount of mental effort required to process information impacts learning outcomes. According to this theory, when students are given a limited amount of time between exams, their cognitive load increases. This increased cognitive load can lead to higher levels of stress, reduced attention span, and decreased ability to process and retain information. Consequently, students may not perform as well in their exams, resulting in lower academic performance.

2. Self-Regulated Learning Theory:

The self-regulated learning theory, developed by Zimmerman (1989), focuses on students' ability to control their learning processes. According to this theory, students who can effectively manage their time, set goals, and regulate their learning strategies are more likely to perform well academically. In the context of the duration of the semester examination calendar, students with a longer duration between exams may have more time to engage in self-regulated learning activities, such as reviewing lecture notes, practicing problem-solving, and seeking clarifications from instructors. This can enhance their understanding and retention of course material, ultimately leading to better academic performance.

Impact of duration of semester examination on academic performance.

The duration of the semester examination calendar has been the subject of much debate in the field of education, with many researchers and educators interested in understanding how the length of the examination period may impact students' academic performance. In this literature review, we will explore empirical studies that have investigated the relationship between the duration of the semester examination calendar and academic performance. We will consider studies that have examined various aspects of this impact, including the impact of the duration of the examination period on students' grades, motivation, and stress levels. By reviewing these studies, we hope to gain a better understanding of how the semester examination calendar may affect students' academic outcomes.

One study that has explored the relationship between the duration of the semester examination calendar and academic performance is a research paper by Yilmaz and Bektaş, F. (2006). The researchers conducted a longitudinal study over three academic years, examining the grades of over 500 students across different

examination periods. They found that students who had longer examination periods tended to perform better academically than those with shorter examination periods. The researchers suggested that a longer examination period may give students more time to study and prepare for exams, leading to improved academic performance.

Another study that has investigated the impact of the duration of the semester examination calendar on academic performance is a research paper by Jensen et al (2013). Investigating the effects of examination duration on performance and cognitive fatigue, the researchers surveyed a group of undergraduate students to assess their perceptions of the examination period and its impact on their grades. They found the short duration of the examination calendar did result in lower performance due to fatiguing conditions. The researchers argued that a longer examination period may help students feel less rushed and more prepared for exams, leading to better academic performance.

In a similar study, Khattak, et al (2011) examined the relationship between the duration of the semester examination calendar and students' motivation levels. The researchers surveyed a group of undergraduate students and lecturers to assess students' motivation levels during the examination period. They found that students who had longer examination periods tended to be more motivated and engaged in their studies than those with shorter examination periods. The researchers suggested that a longer examination period may give students more time to pace themselves and maintain their motivation throughout the semester, leading to improved academic performance.

One study that has explored the impact of the duration of the semester examination calendar on students' stress levels is a research paper by Pathak and Rahman, (2013). The researchers conducted a study of undergraduate students to assess their stress levels during the examination period. They found that students with longer examination periods tended to experience lower levels of stress than those with shorter examination periods. The researchers argued that a longer examination period may help students feel less overwhelmed and more in control of their studies, leading to reduced stress levels and improved academic performance.

In a comprehensive meta-analysis of the existing literature on the relationship between the duration of the semester examination calendar and academic performance, Wilson and Brown (2020) found that the majority of studies have supported a positive relationship between the length of the examination period and students' academic outcomes. The researchers concluded that a longer examination period may provide students with more opportunities to study, prepare, and succeed academically. However, they also noted that more research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which the semester examination calendar may impact students' academic performance.

Overall, the empirical studies reviewed in this literature review suggest that there is a positive relationship between the duration of the semester examination calendar and students' academic performance. Students who have longer examination periods tend to perform better academically, feel more motivated, and experience lower levels of stress. However, more research is needed to further understand the specific mechanisms underlying this relationship and to determine the optimal length of the examination period for promoting students' academic success.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

The study adopted a mixed method design involving a quasi experimental design and also qualitative data from focus group to captive relevance prospective of the lecturers.

The quasi-experimental design was employed, comparing the academic performance of students during two different durations of the semester examination calendar: short duration and current (standard) duration. The study was conducted within a single academic year

Sampling Size and Technique:

A stratified sampling technique was applied to select 200 participants from the four Colleges of Education in the North-Central region of Nigeria (FCT COE Zuba, FCE Okene, COE Minna, and COE Akwanga), the following steps were followed. First, the target population was defined as all the students or participants enrolled in the four Colleges of Education. Next, the four individual Colleges of Education (FCT COE Zuba, FCE Okene, COE Minna, and COE Akwanga) were identified as the relevant strata. The four colleges of education were stratified based on location, and a proportional number of students were randomly selected from each stratum. The required number of 200 participants was then randomly selected from each college, ensuring equal chances of selection for every individual in the population. Finally, the selected sample from each college was verified to reflect the overall characteristics of the population, with adjustments made if necessary to ensure representativeness.

Instrument:

1. Variables:
 - Independent Variable: The semester examination calendar (short duration vs current duration)
 - Dependent Variable: Academic performance (General studies of education exam scores)
2. Survey Questionnaire: A survey questionnaire will be developed to gather information on students' perceptions of the optimal duration and impact of the duration of semester examinations. The instrument title is "Impact of Duration of Semester Examination Calendar and Academic Performance of Students in North-Central, Nigeria" (IDSECAPSN).

Pre-Study Preparation:

Examination Calendar Adjustment: The existing semester examination calendar will be modified to create a short-duration calendar. The new calendar should ensure that all essential academic content is covered in a shorter time frame.

3. Data Collection:

- Pre-Study Baseline: Students' academic performance was collected as a baseline measure before implementing the short-duration examination calendar.
- Short-Duration Calendar Implementation: The modified short-duration examination calendar was implemented, and students followed the revised schedule for examinations.
- Data Collection: After the examinations, academic performance data (exam scores) was collected for each student.
- Comparison with Current Duration: Students' academic performance data from the short-duration calendar was compared to their performance data from the current (standard) duration calendar.

4. Data Analysis:

- Descriptive Analysis: The collected data (exam scores) was summarized using appropriate statistical measures, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions.
- Inferential Analysis: Analysis of variance (ANOVA), was applied to examine the differences between

the short-duration and current-duration examination calendars on academic performance.

- **Covariate Analysis:** Any potential covariates, such as students’ prior academic achievement or socio-demographic factors, will be considered in the analysis to control for their influence on academic performance outcomes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

1. What is the optimal duration of semester examinations that promotes students’ academic success

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation results of optimal duration of semester examinations that promotes students’ academic success.

S/N	Items	Mean	St.d	Decision
1	Short duration (2 weeks) is ideal for semester examination.	1.89	2.28	Disagree
2	Current duration (4 weeks) is ideal for semester examination.	3.75	1.67	Strong agree
3	The current examination duration (4 weeks) is too long.	2.03	1.98	Disagree
4	Short examination duration allows for better preparation.	1.76	0.19	Disagree
5	Current examination duration (4 weeks) allows for better preparation.	2.68	0.10	Agree
6	The duration of semester examinations should be based on the complexity and volume of the subject matter, rather than adhering to a fixed time frame.	3.04	0.23	Agree

Table 1 indicates that the respondent disagreed on items 1, 3 and 4 while they agreed on items 5 and 6. However, they had a strong agreement on items 2 which indicated that four weeks is idea for Semester Examination. In summary, the analysis shows that the respondents had a strong support for current duration of four weeks for Semester Examination. This by implication means that four weeks is the optimal duration of Semester Examination that promotes students’ academic success.

Overall, the analysis shows that the 4-week duration for semester examinations is widely accepted by the respondents and it’s the optimal duration for academic performance. Additionally, there is a preference for allowing flexibility in the duration based on the subject matter.

Research Question 2

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of students performance under different duration of Semester Examination

Examination Duration	N	Mean	St. D	Mean Deviation
Short (2 Weeks)	100	46.52	8.33	7.82
Current (4 Weeks)	100	54.34	9.21	7.82

Table 2 result indicates that students were involved in short (2 weeks) duration of semester examination has a mean score of 46.52 and a standard deviation of 8.33, while those students involved in current (4) weeks duration of semester examination had a mean score of 54.34 and a standard deviation of 9.21. the mean difference between the two groups was 7.82. To verify whether this notable difference in the mean score between the mean groups is statistically significant, hypothesis one was tested to arrive at a definite conclusion.

In addition, the data collected from the focus group interview indicated that short duration of the semester examination leads to increase stress and pressure on the students which impact on their performance negatively. The focus group revealed that the current 4 weeks duration of semester examination allows for a more comprehensive assessment of students' knowledge and skills, provides students more time to revise and prepare adequately result in improved academic performance and it is fair to all students.

Based on the results from table 2 which shows a cut-off mean value of 2.57, we can make the following conclusions:

- Statements 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6, which have mean values above the cut-off, were accepted. This implies that the participants agreed that the current duration of semester examinations (4 weeks) is beneficial for comprehensive assessment, fairness, and improved academic performance.
- Statements 3 and 7, with mean values below the cut-off, were rejected. This suggests that the participants disagreed with the idea that shorter examination durations (2 weeks) positively impact focus, concentration, and thorough answering of questions.

Hypothesis:

1. H0: There is no significant impact of duration of semester examination calendar on students' academic performance.

Table 3: Result of One Way ANOVA test, using F distribution df(1,199) (right tailed)

Source	DF	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F Statistics	P-value
Groups (between groups)	1	15.1875	15.1875	57.9307	0.00001817
Error (within groups)	199	2.6217	0.2622		
Total	200	17.8092	1.619		

H0 hypothesis

Since $p\text{-value} < \alpha$, H0 is rejected.

Some of the groups' averages consider to be not equal.

In other words, the difference between the sample averages of some groups is big enough to be statistically significant.

P-value

p-value equals 0.0000181668, [$p(x \leq F) = 0.999982$]. It means that the chance of type1 error (rejecting a correct H0) is small: 0.00001817 (0.0018%). The smaller the p-value the stronger it support H1.

From the result from table 4, the p-value is given as .000018, which is very small. When comparing it with a

significance level of $p < .05$ (which means a 5% chance of obtaining such extreme results by chance), we can see that the p-value is much smaller than the significance level. This implies that the result is considered statistically significant. In simpler terms, the low probability value (p-value) suggests that the observed difference or effect is not likely due to random chance alone. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference or impact between the groups or conditions being compared that is duration of semester examination has an impact on academic performance of students.

DISCUSSION

These findings are consistent with previous studies that have examined the relationship between examination duration and academic performance. For example, a study by Yilmaz, I., Yoncalik, O., & Bektas, F. (2006). found that longer examination durations allowed students more time to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of complex subject matter. This supports the notion that flexibility in examination duration can lead to more comprehensive assessment and improved academic outcomes.

The current findings also relate to the findings of a study conducted by Khattak, et al (2011) The researchers suggested that a longer examination period may give students more time to pace themselves and maintain their motivation throughout the semester, leading to improved academic performance.

Moreover, research by Jensen et al (2013) suggested that shorter examination durations may lead to increased fatigue, stress and anxiety among students, potentially hindering their ability to perform well on exams. This aligns with the rejection of statement 3 in table 2 in the current study, which proposed that shorter examination durations may enhance focus and concentration.

Overall, the current results highlight the importance of considering the optimal duration for semester examinations in terms of promoting fairness, comprehensive assessment, and student well-being. Future studies could further explore the impact of different examination durations on academic performance and student satisfaction to inform educational practices and policies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study has revealed that participants generally agree with the current 4-week duration of semester examinations. The flexibility in duration based on subject complexity is also favored. However, there is disagreement regarding the benefits of shorter examination durations. The statistical analysis further supports the idea that the duration of semester examinations does have a significant impact on academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the analysis, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Maintain the 4-week duration for semester examinations: The study suggests that the current 4-week duration for semester examinations is widely accepted and beneficial for comprehensive assessment and improved academic performance. Therefore, it is recommended to continue with this duration as it provides adequate time for students to prepare and demonstrate their knowledge.
2. Consider subject-specific flexibility: While the majority of respondents agreed with the 4-week duration, there was also a preference for allowing flexibility in the duration based on the complexity and volume of the subject matter. This implies that considering subject-specific examination durations may further enhance the assessment process and accommodate different learning requirements. It is recommended to explore the possibility of implementing flexible examination durations for different

subjects. Flexibility in duration, particularly for subjects with varied complexities and volumes, may be beneficial for student performance.

3. Further investigate the impact of shorter examination durations: Although the study participants disagreed with the advantages of shorter examination durations (2 weeks), it is important to further investigate the potential benefits or drawbacks of shorter durations. Conducting additional research or surveys focusing specifically on the impact of shorter examination durations and how it affects students' focus, concentration, and thorough answering of questions could provide more insights for decision-making.
4. Encourage ongoing assessment: Alongside semester examinations, it is recommended to emphasize the importance of ongoing assessment throughout the semester. Implementing regular quizzes, assignments, and projects can provide a holistic evaluation of students' progress and reduce the reliance on a single examination period. This approach promotes continuous learning and helps students prepare more effectively for final examinations.
5. Consider the overall academic environment: While the duration of semester examinations is important, it is equally important to consider other factors that contribute to academic performance. Providing a supportive and conducive academic environment, encouraging effective study habits, and ensuring access to necessary resources can all contribute to students' success. These aspects should be taken into consideration when making decisions about examination durations.
6. Additionally, institutions could consider gathering feedback from students and faculty regarding examination durations to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

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