

# **MANAGING EXAMINATION CRISIS IN NIGERIA: THE WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL (WAEC)'S EXPERIENCE**

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## ABSTRACT

The conduct of examinations in Nigeria has been facing crisis brought about by developments in the education sector. There has been a steady increase in the candidature for examinations over the years. Coupled with this increase are problems arising from increasing incidence of examination malpractice, high failure rate, deteriorating infrastructure, shortage of well trained teachers and dwindling level of funding. In recent times, the incidence of these crises has reached such an alarming and critical level that all stakeholders in education in the country are seeking long term solution. The paper discusses some of the problems associated with the conduct of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in Nigeria. It also highlights how WAEC has been contending with the crisis through effective management of personal and timely deployment of materials, along with application of information and communication technology while ensuring that the high standard of its examinations and certification are not compromised. Recommendations are proffered for the improvement of the strategies already put in place by WAEC.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Examination is the process of finding out how much of the objectives of specific learning tasks a learner has learnt. It is a spoken or written test of knowledge.

Examinations are used for selection, certification and for reporting of progress to parents and policy makers. Results of public examinations are also used to monitor the performance of the educational system and as an accountability measure of schools. Fagbamiye (1998) described examination as a tool for measuring and judging the standard of education in any country. Examination is therefore an integral part of the teaching-learning process.

Examinations could be internally or externally conducted. Internal examinations (school-based examinations) are usually developed and administered by schools using teacher-made tests. School-based examinations are conducted either weekly, termly or at the end of the school year. On the other hand, external examinations (public examinations) are developed and administered by public examination bodies. Public examination bodies in Nigeria include the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the National Examinations Council (NECO), the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), and the National Teachers Institute (NTI).

The conduct of examinations in Nigeria is associated with some problems. Mohammed, Ekpunobi, Olaseinde, Ibitoye and Fape (2007) identified examination malpractice, large classes, poor teaching, use of faulty assessment practice and inadequacy of quality teachers as some of the problems of examination in Nigerian

classrooms. Adeyegbe (2000) also identified inflation and conjuring of test scores as problems of examination in Nigeria. Similarly, Kolo and Ojo (2005) identified examination malpractice as the greatest threat to assessment in Nigeria.

WAEC conducts the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) in May/June for school candidates and November/December for private candidates in Nigeria. Like other examinations in Nigeria, the conduct of WASSCE is associated with a lot of challenges. These challenges include large candidature, poor funding, shortage of staff, poor infrastructure, and shortage of committed examination functionaries, unreliable continuous assessment scores and examination malpractice. These challenges affect the effective conduct of the examination, the reliability of the results and the validity of the examinations.

This paper therefore, discusses the challenges encountered in the conduct of the WASSCE in Nigeria and efforts being made by WAEC to overcome these challenges.

## **2. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONDUCT OF THE WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION IN NIGERIA**

### **(1) Examination Malpractice**

Examination malpractice is the act of breaking the rules governing the conduct of an examination in order to gain some advantages. According to Ojerinde (2003), examination malpractice has remained a nightmare, not only to WAEC but also to NECO and JAMB. The Daily Trust editorial (2008) observed that Government

functionaries, school authority, invigilators, examiners, parents and students are all guilty of the iniquitous trend of examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice has assumed new and wide dimension in WASSCE like in other examinations in Nigeria. The different forms of examination malpractice include among others: leakage, collusion, bringing prepared answers to the examination hall; swapping of candidates' scripts; sending answers to candidates using telephone; impersonation; and unreliable continuous assessment scores from school authority. Examination malpractice affects the finances and the public confidence in WAEC. WAEC spends a lot of money on the Committees that sit to consider the reports on examination malpractice. Furthermore whenever there is leakage, WAEC spends a lot of money to reprint the leaked papers. The re-scheduling of such papers also affects the marking of the papers and release of results. In addition, the public points accusing fingers at WAEC's staff. Malpractice gives an undue advantage to the candidates involved thereby rendering their results unreliable if such candidates are not caught and their result cancelled.

## (2) **Shortage of Staff**

For effective administration of WASSCE, several custodian centres are created by WAEC for the custody, distribution and collection of examination materials. Similarly there are many centres for the examination (11,913 for the May/June 2009) and many marking venues and examiners (74 marking venues and 58,571 examiners for the July 2009 marking exercise). Consequently, a large number of staff is required to man the custodian centres, inspect and monitor the

examination and service the marking venues. There is usually undue pressure on the 2018 staff of WAEC during these critical activities.

### (3) **Large Candidature for the Examination**

Since the turn of the millennium, over one million candidates register each year for the school candidates' examination. Similarly over three hundred thousand candidates register annually for the private candidates' examination. Table I shows the entry figures for WASSCE from 2000 – 2008.

***Table I: Entry Figures for WASSCE from 2000 to 2008***

<b>Year</b>	<b>May/June</b>	<b>October/November</b>
2004	1,052,672	513,451
2005	1,091,676	398,689
2006	1,184,384	423,518
2007	1,275,330	378,018
2008	1,369,142	372,600

**Source: The West African Examinations Council, Yaba, Lagos**

The large candidature for the examination requires a lot of money for the production of examination materials. In addition the materials especially the question papers must be produced within a short period. Also corresponding to the large candidature is the large number of examination centres and candidates' scripts which requires so many supervisors and invigilators, and examiners respectively.

#### (4) **Poor Infrastructural Facilities**

Good infrastructural facilities are sine qua non for the effective conduct of examinations. Ayodele, Adegbile and Adewale (2003) argued that adequate work space, comfortable seats and tables among others are necessary for testees to demonstrate their ability to achieve significantly. Registration of large number of candidates has become a common practice by many schools. Often times such schools do not have spacious examination halls, adequate laboratories and adequate furniture for their candidates. Consequently candidates write their examination in overcrowded halls or classrooms using unsuitable furniture. In addition, the total absence of information and communication technology facilities in most of the schools affects the e-registration exercise that WAEC has started.

WAEC needs a good transport network to facilitate the movement of the examination materials to and fro the examination centres, majority of which are in remote areas. The movement of the materials is often delayed because of the poor state of the roads. In some cases a journey that ought to have taken one hour takes as long as four hours due to bad roads. Equally difficult to access are the riverine areas. This has often delayed the commencement of the examination in the affected areas as well as submission of candidates' scripts at custodian centres. Equally required for effective distribution of examination materials are utility vehicles. The acquisition of the required number of such vehicles has not been possible because of funds constraint. This has often put pressure on the available ones and tension on the staff who manage the vehicles.

(5) **Funding**

The two main sources of income for WAEC are the Federal Government and Examination fees. The income from these sources is for the payment of staff's salaries and allowances, and payment to examination functionaries and other expenses. The income is hardly sufficient for the ever increasing expenses. Consequently, some financial obligations of WAEC are met with difficulties, leading to delay in payment and purchase of some materials.

(6) **High Failure Rate**

The high percentage of the candidates who failed WASSCE yearly has become worrisome. This is reflected in the low percentage of the candidates that meets the university admission requirements. The minimum admission requirement for most courses in Nigerian universities is credit passes in at least five subjects including English Language and Mathematics. Table II shows the percentage of candidates who obtained credit passes in at least five subjects including English Language and Mathematics in May/June WASSCE between 2005 and 2008.

**Table II: Percentage of Candidates who obtained credit passes in at least five subjects including English Language and Mathematics in May/June WASSCE between 2005 and 2008**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage with Five Credit Passes and Above</b>
2005	27.53
2006	15.56
2007	25.54
2008	13.76

*Source: Public Affairs Department of the WAEC, Lagos*

There has been public outcry over the dismal performance of candidates at WASSCE. Some have even accused WAEC of deliberately failing the candidates.

(7) **Shortage of Committed Examination Functionaries**

WAEC relies on examination functionaries for most of its operations. These include Item Writers, Moderators, Examiners, Supervisors, Invigilators and Script Checkers. WAEC has been experiencing problem of shortage of committed examination functionaries over the years. For example, Supervisors and Invigilators have been identified as perpetrators of examination malpractices. Similarly some parcels of scripts are returned unmarked from some marking venues because of shortage of examiners. The increasing numbers of errors (discovered by script checkers and corrected at the marking venues) made by examiners show their low level of commitment.

**3 WAEC'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

The problems associated with the conduct of the WASSCE are such that if not urgently addressed may lead to a complete breakdown or disaster. The management strategies of WAEC are therefore proactive measures aimed at preventing crisis and/or addressing crisis if it occurs.

(1) **Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the Operations of WAEC**

WAEC has continued to address a number of problems through the application of information and communication technology to its operations. For example, the e-registration project of WAEC initiated in 2005 has made registration for the examination, capturing and processing of entry documents and arrangements for

the conduct of the examination less cumbersome for the candidates and WAEC.

Among the areas addressed by the e-registration are:

- (a) Ability to amend candidates' records (both pictures and text) before the release of result;
- (b) Possibility of registering candidates up till a week to the conduct of the first paper;
- (c) Electronic production of packing list by centres/schools;
- (d) Anti-fraud mechanism against entry form sales racketeering; and
- (e) Principals/candidates need not frequently visit WAEC offices.

In the same vein, WAEC has made the release and dissemination of the results of its examination less problematic by posting its results on the internet. This allows candidates to access and even download their results. It has also made e-confirmation of result possible. The acquisition of state of the art ICT facilities by WAEC has also enhanced the processing of results.

## **(2) Embossing Photographs on Certificates**

WAEC, in 1999 started embossing candidates' photographs on their certificates as a means of checking the increasing cases of impersonation in its examinations.

## **(3) Establishment of More Marking Venues and Examination Centres**

There have been complaints that the marking venues are far from the residence of most of the examiners. Consequently, some have threatened to withdraw their services, while others have withdrawn theirs. In addition, WAEC has a lot of scripts to be marked because of large candidature. As a result of these,

WAEC has established more marking venues to retain the experienced examiners and also to attract qualified new ones for recruitment.

More examination centres have also been established outside the cities for the private candidates' examinations in order to bring the examination nearer to the candidates.

(4) **Establishment of Zonal and Branch Offices**

In recent years, WAEC has established some zonal and branch offices in some states. This was to decentralise the activities of the organisation. Thus it has become possible to distribute examination materials and collect candidates' scripts on daily basis. This has also brought the services of WAEC closer to its clientele and lightened the difficulties of their transactions with WAEC for various services.

(5) **Inspection of Schools**

WAEC inspects schools before granting the schools approval to register students for WASSCE. During the inspection, WAEC assesses the capacity of the schools to prepare students for WASSCE. WAEC also assesses the adequacy of the school halls, furniture and laboratories for the examination. Only schools that meet the minimum standard are granted approval to register students for WASSCE.

Furthermore, WAEC re-inspects approved schools to ascertain their continued suitability for the examination. During such visits, schools are encouraged to upgrade their facilities to meet their increasing candidature for WASSCE.

(6) **Regular and Continuous Training of Staff and Examination Functionaries**

Through Items Writing Workshops organised by WAEC, new Item Writers are exposed to the nitty-gritty of item writing while the experienced ones are kept abreast with the current development in educational assessment. Thus the Item Writers are enabled to write quality items. Similarly, workshops and trainings are regularly organised for Moderators, Examiners and Scripts Checkers in order to improve the quality of their services.

WAEC also organises regularly, in-house or sourced trainings for staff of the various Divisions as a means of preparing them to meet the challenges of their Divisions and of keeping abreast with the best practices in educational assessment.

(7) **Purchase of more Utility Vehicles**

WAEC, over the years has continued to purchase more utility vehicles for effective movement of examination materials.

(8) **Supervision of the Printing of Security Materials, Inspection and Monitoring of Examination Centres**

In addition to other security measures, WAEC deploys very senior staff to supervise the printing of examination materials to prevent leakage of the questions. Similarly, senior staff is deployed to inspect and monitor examination centres to ensure that the examinations are conducted accordingly.

WAEC also appoints teachers on the recommendation of their State Ministries of Education as Supervisors. In addition, the Supervisors are swapped on daily

basis so as to ensure that they do not compromise the conduct of the examination.

(9) **Prompt Replacement of Compromised Papers**

In order for WAEC to maintain its credibility, it has a policy of prompt replacement of any compromised paper in its examinations.

(10) **Review of Examination Functionaries' Remuneration and Staff**

**Salaries:**

In order to sufficiently motivate examination functionaries and staff, WAEC has continued to regularly review the remuneration of all the categories of the examination functionaries as well as staff's salaries and allowances.

Staff conditions of service have also been a top priority of WAEC. This is in order to attract and retain staff.

(11) **Recruitment of New Staff and Examination Functionaries**

WAEC has continued to recruit appropriate calibre of staff to fill existing vacancies and meet the need for an enlarged workforce. Similarly examination functionaries are regularly recruited to meet the growing need for more functionaries.

(12) **Collaboration with Other Stakeholders**

WAEC has embarked on an extensive collaboration with various stakeholders in a bid to solving most of the problems associate with its examinations. To ensure that the custodian centres are properly secured for the custody of the examination materials, WAEC uses the strong rooms of some financial institutions and State Ministries of Education. The various state governments have also been assisting WAEC in the fight against examinations malpractice by

approving the participation of senior officers of their Ministries of Education in the inspection and monitoring of examination centres during the examinations. Some of the state governments have also provided accommodation for temporary offices and land for the building of permanent Zonal or Branch Offices in their states. More importantly, some states have donated utility vehicles to WAEC to facilitate the conduct of examinations in their states.

In collaboration with the mass media, the public is enlightened on the ills of examination malpractice and discouraged from perpetuating it. Similarly the All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) has complemented WAEC's efforts at curbing examination malpractice through its members.

(13) **Improving Learning and Teaching in Schools**

The candidates' performance depends on the quality of learning and teaching in schools. In order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in school, WAEC has continued to organise seminars and workshops that would enhance teaching in school. The Research Division of WAEC also conducts studies on teaching and learning. The findings and recommendations of such studies are made available to the various State Ministries of Education and schools.

WAEC has also made available to the teachers through their various schools, the Chief Examiner's report on the WASSCE. The Chief Examiners' reports include among others, candidates' weaknesses and strengths and suggestions on how to remedy the weaknesses.

(14) **Ad hoc Deployment of Staff**

The conduct of examination, coordination and marking activities of the Test Administration Division of WAEC requires the support of staff of other Divisions. Similarly, the Computer Service Division requires additional staff during examination data capturing and production of examination materials. In order to ensure that these activities are carried out accordingly and that targets are met, WAEC deploys competent staff of other Divisions on ad hoc basis to the Divisions requiring their assistance.

**4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although most of the problems associated with the conduct of WASSCE are being effectively managed by WAEC, efforts should be made to solve them. Consequently, the following recommendations are made:

- (1.) There should be regular upgrading of ICT facilities and appropriate training of the operators.
- (2.) There should be regular review of remuneration of the examinations functionaries.
- (3.) Provision of suitable examination halls and furniture for examination should be a necessary condition for approval of examination centres. Re-inspection of schools should also be more frequent.
- (4.) WAEC should undertake rigorous recruitment drive for examiners, moderators and item writers.
- (5.) Schools should be made more conducive for teaching and learning.
- (6.) The state of infrastructural facilities in schools should be improved.
- (7.) There should be a re-orientation of the populace for better order of societal values.

- (8.) ICT should be introduced in schools.
- (9.) The tempo of advocacy against examination malpractice should be increased.
- (10.) Establishment of more marking venues should be on a continuous basis.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Examination is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Public examinations like school-based examinations in Nigeria are associated with a number of challenges. The paper discussed the problems that WAEC contends with in conducting WASSCE. It also highlighted the various strategies employed by WAEC in managing the examination crisis and made suggestions on how WAEC could further improve in the management of the problems encountered during the conduct of WASSCE in Nigeria.

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