**TEST ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES OF PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN**

**NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL**

**CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

By Mr. Patrick Areghan, Mrs. Comfort Agwu and Mr. Austine Aidokhai

**ABSTRACT**

Assessment outcome in Public Examinations is dependent on many variables ranging from the learning process, quality of the assessment instruments to the test administration process and procedure. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is one of such public examinations in Nigeria. It is an international examination conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Anglophone West Africa. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is a high-stake examination since high performance in the Examination is among the pre-requisite requirements for admissions into tertiary institutions, employment and promotions. As a result, many ill-prepared prospective candidates seek unethical means of acquiring WAEC Certificates as proof of educational attainment. There is no gainsaying that the standard procedures adopted for the development of assessment instrument have a lot of built-in checks which ensure that the tests are reliable and valid. However, if the test administration stage of an assessment system is not properly handled, the assessment outcome could be distorted. This Paper examines the potential sources of distortion during the administration of WASSCE and the marking of WASCE scripts in Nigeria. It discusses the pragmatic strategies that have been adopted over time by the Nigeria Office of the West African Examinations Council to expand the framework for action in order to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its processes for test administration and marking. The evidence of success, other approaches that are being explored and the challenges encountered are highlighted while some possible areas of focus for further improvement are suggested.

*Key issues: Assessment outcomes, test procedures, WAEC action framework for tests.*

Email address: [hnowaeclagos@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hnowaeclagos@yahoo.co.uk)

Affiliation: The West African Examinations Council, WAEC, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

**INTRODUCTION**

The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is an achievement test administered to school candidates in the third year of the Senior Secondary School. The examination measures the extent to which the candidates have understood the content of the teaching curriculum approved by the country. Test Administration procedures are basically the same for Standardized Tests the world over.

However, large candidature, inadequate facilities and insufficient manpower have implications in the validity of assessment outcomes. One of the determinants of quality in educational assessment is its predictive validity. If a candidate scores high in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and turns out to be a failure in a tertiary institution, the credibility of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) assessment would definitely be questioned.

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) as an International Examining body therefore periodically reviews its Test Administration procedures with a view to minimizing distortions and coming out with very reliable scores.

We would examine some aspects of the procedures which overtime have given room for distortion in test outcomes, the adaptive and consequential approaches of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) under three categories – pre-examination, during the examination and post examination.

**1.** **PRE-EXAMINATION PROCEDURES**

* 1. Inspection of Schools for Recognition

Preparation of candidates for achievement test begins from the learning environment. The qualification of Instructors and the facilities at their disposal are very crucial for learning outcomes. Some individuals in the country have taken the running of private schools as a lucrative business and as such many substandard schools spring up and apply to present candidates for WAEC examinations. The WAEC checks this during the inspection of new schools for approval.

* 1. Data Capturing and Validation of Entries

The online process for capturing prospective candidates’ data has

been made easy for public use. Schools are provided with CD’s to do

off-line registration first. They are expected to ensure that all entries are validated before uploading them on the internet. When registration is completed, the entry information is still printed to enable the candidates confirm their entries and that errors have been corrected. Rules and Regulations together with the consequences of violating them are made available to candidates.

1.3 Selection of Supervisors

Competence and dedication of personnel used in the administration of test have effect on the quality of the assessment.

Though both Public and Private Schools register candidates for the examinations, only personnel from the public schools are used as Supervisors. They are usually very senior staff, nominated by the various Education Districts. The final selection is done by the Ministries of Education in the various states. This way, accountability for actions or inactions is achieved. The Supervisors are trained on how to conduct standardized tests after which a manual of testing procedures is given to each of them.

Given below is a summary of possible sources of distortion in our pre-examination procedures and checks put in place.

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| **POSSIBLE SOURCES OF DISTORTION** | **CHECKS PUT IN PLACE** |
| **Window dressing during inspection for approval.** | Unannounced inspection |
| **Non improvement of available facilities over the years.** | Re-inspection every five (5) years to ensure that facilities are updated to meet with the increasing number of students.. |
| **Presenting of unqualified teachers during inspection.** | Check teachers’ credentials and give them tasks to perform. |
| **Non upload of passport photograph.** | The registration module is made in such a way as to prompt the operator to verify the passport photograph before continuing with registration. |
| **Upload of wrong passport photograph/use of dummy images.** | Certificates are presently photo embossed. |
| **Registration of non school candidates.** | Use of class register to whittle the number of candidates registered by the school. |
| **Request for amendment after examination.** | Entry data/photo cards are printable immediately at submission of entry. Request for amendments are not entertained after the examinations. |
| **Pre arranged supervisor.** | Use of supervisors from public schools only.  Unannounced swapping of supervisors.  Swapping of school principals. |
| **Compromise of question papers in insecure custodian.** | Regular inspection and change of custodian centres. Regular change of locks – daily dropping of question papers. |

**2.** **DURING THE EXAMINATION**

2.1 Packing and Movement of Test Papers

Test papers are packed within maximum of 48 hours to the test date using the already circulated time table. The papers are moved daily from the WAEC Offices to the distribution centres with a security escort. The Supervisors report each day to collect the test papers one hour before the scheduled time. The test papers are carried in locked mail bags to the various centres where only the Principal or his assistant has the duplicate key to the mail bag.

2.2 Printing and Use of Examination Documents

Photo Albums and Photo cards

From the data supplied online, photo albums are printed for school candidates while the individual candidate is expected to print his or her Photo card which will be used as an admittance slip into the examination hall. Even for the private candidates an album is produced for each centre.

Attendance and Mark sheets

Attendance and Mark sheets are printed on subject basis by centre for the use of the Supervisors and Examiners.

Objective Answer Sheets

The Objective Answer Sheets are presently pre-printed with the candidates’ examination information to ensure correctness and for ease of scanning.

Answer Booklets

Answer booklets for written tests (Essay and Practical) are encoded with watermarks and security numbers. The marks vary from diet to diet to prevent cheats from using the left over from one examination for another. Records of centres and subjects for which they are meant to be used are properly kept in the various offices for reference purposes.

While the examinations are on, Inspectors from the Education Districts, Federal and State Ministries of Education go round to inspect the conduct of students and Supervisors.

Staff of the Council are also, routinely deployed to various centres to monitor activities within and outside the examination halls. They are armed with the Photo Album of the centre which contains the images of all the candidates in the centre and an “On the Spot” Attendance Sheet which is distinct from the normal Attendance Register used by the Supervisors.

While the Photo Album is used to detect impersonation, an “On the Spot” Attendance Sheet is used to check for candidates who could possibly be physically absent in the hall but have scripts submitted for them at the end of the examinations.

**Conduct of Orals/Aurals and Early Practicals**

Some subjects like French, Arabic, Music, Auto Mechanics, Food & Nutrition, Clothing & Textiles and Home Management have Oral/Practical components that are scored on the spot by sole examiners.

These personnel serve as both administrators and markers. They are explicitly told not to give assistance to candidates through rephrasing questions, pronunciation or explain the question requirements. They are also not to indicate to candidates what they have done correctly or incorrectly.

Report forms are provided for completion by the Inspector, Supervisor, Invigilator and the candidate involved in any act of malpractice.

Below is a summary of some sources of distortion during examination and checks put in place.

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| **POSSIBLE SOURCES OF DISTORTION** | **CHECKS PUT IN PLACE** |
| **Long custody of question papers.** | Maximum of four-eight (48) hours delivery. |
| **Ripping open of question papers by supervisors before they reach the examination centres** | Use of locked mail bags which can only be opened by the Principal of the school. |
| **Bringing cribs into the examination hall, tele-communication gadgets and other unauthorized resources.** | Candidates are searched before entering the examination hall by Supervisors. Should such devices be seen with a candidate? Entire results are cancelled. |
| **Lateness to examination centres.** | Candidates not allowed into examination hall 30 minutes after the commencement of the paper. |
| **Locking the school gate against Inspectors.** | Monitors go into the schools along with the Supervisors. |
| **Use of answer booklet from previous examinations.** | Change of security features on answer booklet from diet to diet. |
| **Use of blank objective sheets.** | Pre-printing of objective answer sheets. |
| **Smuggling out answer booklets.** | Supervisors’ sign answer booklets of candidates while examination is on. |
| **Impersonation and tampering with photo cards/albums.** | Office copies of albums are used by Inspectors to identify candidates. |
| **Writing for non appearing candidates. Marking candidates present when they are absent.** | Use of ‘on the spot’ attendance sheet. |
| **Use of compartmentalised rooms for examinations.** | Imposition of extra supervisors. |
| **Collaboration by candidates** | Scrutiny of scripts by Examiners. |

**3.** **POST-EXAMINATION ACTIVITIES**

3.1 Irregularities

At the end of each examination, all acts of malpractices are collated, centres where collusion was prevalent are listed state by state for thorough scrutiny by examiners. Such list is circulated to all marking venues.

3.2 Marking of Scripts

Marking of scripts commences three weeks after the examination.

In preparing scripts for marking, control cards allocating specified number of scripts to examiners by numbers rather than by names are produced to ensure that scripts are not marked within the zones where they were generated.

Selected qualified Senior Examiners meet for 5 days to further standardize answers to questions in their various subjects and thereafter coordinate other Assistant Examiners for three days. Consistency is ensured through standardized marking of dummy scripts before live scripts are issued to the examiners. During marking the activities of Assistant Examiners are monitored and information is provided to the examiners on how to detect malpractice in the scripts. The senior examiners select randomly, one out of every ten scripts scored by an Assistant Examiner for vetting. Where there is a difference of more than + 2 marks in a question, the Assistant Examiner is made to remark the scripts of all the candidates who answered that question number.

In addition to the vetting of marked scripts by Senior Examiners, Checkers are recruited to go through the marked scripts for possible errors of addition, omission and transfer of scores into the Optical Mark Reader which in turn is read against the mark sheets by qualified staff. These checks are to reduce possible human errors.

Examiners whose marking were questionable are barred from further participation in marking. A list of such Examiners is usually circulated to all marking venues across the country during subsequent marking exercises.

3.3 Movement of End Documents to Scanning Zones

From the Marking Venues, Mark sheets as well as the Optical Mark Readers are serially arranged by subject and transported in separate vehicles to offices from where they will be sent to designated scanning zones.

Scripts are evacuated for storage in designated offices and kept for three years. This period of storage is to ensure that all queries are resolved and that results are consolidated.

3.4 Release of Results

Once the grades are fixed, the Computer Services Division will release results except those of candidates whose results are to be withheld for irregular offences during the examinations.

Results of examination cheats are cancelled and in some cases the cheats are barred from sitting for the WASSCE for a specified period after investigations and due consideration by the appropriate Committee of Council.

Some sources of distortion during marking of scripts and after the release of results and checks put in place are summarized below.

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| **POSSIBLE SOURCES OF DISTORTION** | **CHECKS PUT IN PLACE** |
| **Tracing scripts to the Examiners at marking venues.** | Use of control cards and zoning lists.  Use of numbers instead of names of Examiners. |
| **Poor marking by Assistant Examiners.** | International Preliminary Coordination.  Team Leaders and Assistant Examiners coordinate for three (3) days.  Vetting of one out of every ten scripts. |
| **Wrong addition and transfer of scores.** | Checkers are employed.  Examiners read out scores from Mark Sheets while a staff checks with the Optical Mark Reader (OMR). |
| **Submission of multiple answer booklets.** | Cancellation of entire results. |
| **Litigation.** | Exhibits are kept for a period of three (3) years of violating them.  Rules and regulations are made available during registration and the consequences are properly spelt out. |
| **Request for Review of Scripts.** | Candidates’ scripts are kept for three (3) years. |
| **Candidates attempting more questions than what is specified in the rubrics.** | Examiners as well as checkers are provided with the rubrics for each subject. Only scores for the number specified in the rubrics are added. |

The various precautions taken at each stage of the Test Administration procedures are to ensure the validity and reliability of test outcomes.

**4.** **CHALLENGES**

4.1 Data Capture

Entries are usually floated six (6) months to the commencement of the examinations. Candidates enter for the examination through e-registration. Many schools, public and private complete the up-load of candidates’ data less one month to the commencement of the examination. This causes delay in the printing and dispatch of pre-examination documents.

4.2 Road Network

Nigeria is a big country with large expanse of land. During the conduct of examination, materials must be conveyed to the remotest areas of the country as long as a school exists there.

However, the condition of roads in the country makes it impossible to reach some areas on time and as such, it is difficult for examination to commence at the same time in all centres.

4.3 Non Coverage of Teaching Curriculum

The incessant strike action by teachers in the country keeps students out of the classroom for one month in a school year. This makes it impossible for the teachers to cover the curriculum for the year. Students are therefore disadvantaged since the test papers must have a complete coverage of the examination syllabus drawn from the teaching curriculum.

4.4 Law Enforcement

Although there is a decree in Nigeria against examination malpractice, but it has not been strictly enforced. When apprehended examination cheats are handed over to the police little is heard of the case afterwards.

4.5 Dearth of Examiners

Examiners are drawn largely from schools and the marking exercise is usually during school sessions. The teachers are thrust between coping with their school work and completion of the exercise on schedule.

The remuneration is also not attractive enough. Teachers therefore are reluctant to participate in t he marking exercise.

**5.** **POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

5.1 E-Marking

WAEC is already making arrangements for e-marking. Though a lot of fund is required for a take off, when fully operational it will be cheaper and will enhance the quality of assessments, improve the security of scripts, consistency of marking and eliminate human errors in the addition and transfer of scores and results would also be released timely.

5.2 Monitoring Teachers Activities in Schools

Given the fact that some candidates resort to unwholesome practices during examinations because they are ill prepared, the Ministries of Education at various States should monitor closely the quality of instruction in schools, equip laboratories, sanction erring teachers, put in place strategies that will improve teacher-student relationship and ensure that students are promoted from one class to the other based on acceptable performance in class tests.

**6.** **CONCLUSION**

The challenges of proper administration of tests and coming out with valid and reliable assessment outcomes in the country are enormous because distortion in the process is a societal ill which examining bodies will continue to fight..

This paper has highlighted sources within the test administration procedure that brings distortion of assessment outcomes. It has also brought to light the various attempts made by the West African Examinations Council to reduce their effects on assessment such that test outcomes would be a true reflection of candidates’ abilities.

WAEC remains committed to excellence and is open to ideas and novel practices that would further enhance her capacity in the administration of tests.

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