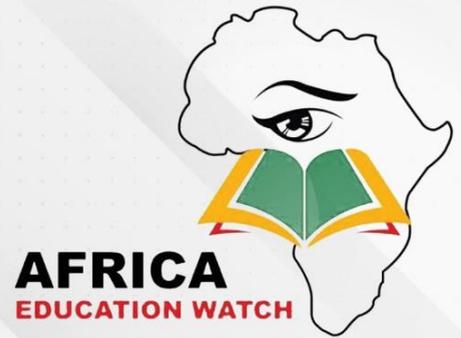
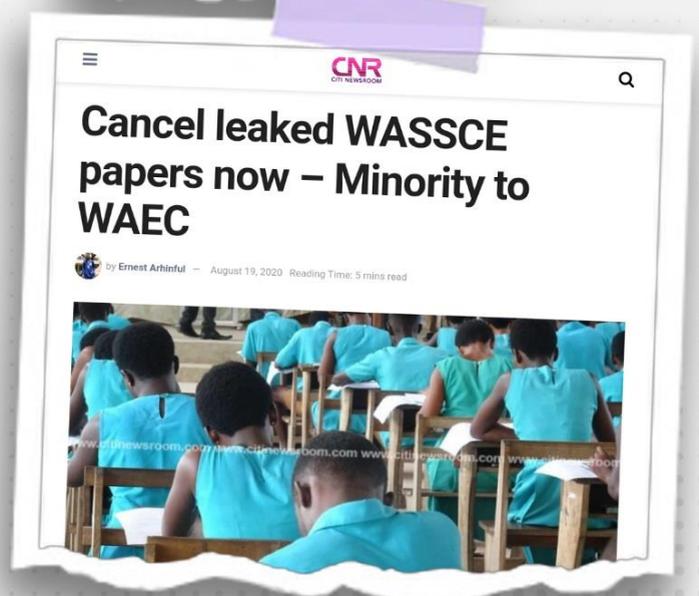


THE 2020 WASSCE Report



(An Independent Assessment of the
conduct of the 2020 WASSCE by WAEC)



This Independent Assessment of the conduct of the 2020 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) was commissioned by Africa Education Watch.

About Africa Education Watch

Africa Education Watch (Eduwatch) is an Education Policy Research and Advocacy Organization working with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Governments and the Private Sector to promote an equitable, accountable and responsive education system that assures of quality and equal opportunities for all. Working with partners in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Kenya and Nigeria, we envision a continent with globally competitive human capital that drives economic and social development.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) is the body tasked to conduct education assessments for final year Junior and Senior High School students in Ghana. With its core values; integrity, professionalism, accountability, transparency, team work, innovativeness and excellence, the Council's main objective is to conduct exams in the public interest, and award certificates of high standards of attainment, similar to that of British Examining authorities.

WAEC is on a mission to be Africa's foremost examining body providing qualitative and reliable educational assessment, encouraging academic and moral excellence, and promoting sustainable human resource development and international co-operation. However, this mission is threatened by the numerous irregularities that have characterized the conduct of examinations, with a section of the public describing the reoccurrences as an annual ritual. The numerous irregularities in the 2020 West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) threatens the integrity of the exams, damages the reputation of the authority responsible for conducting them, and further casts doubt on the value of certificates awarded.

A collective effort by all stakeholders led by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to identify and address the causes of examination irregularities and ensure a credible certification system commences with this report on the conduct of the 2020 WASSCE. It traces the root cause of various examination irregularities by examining the activities of various actors within the examinations value chain, while making policy and administrative recommendations to end examination irregularities and enhance the credibility of WAEC's assessment and certification system in Ghana and West Africa.

INTRODUCTION

This report investigates and documents the irregularities that characterised the conduct of the 2020 WASSCE by WAEC. With a review of relevant literature on previous WAEC examinations' reports in Ghana, it further discusses the root causes, symptoms, and effects of WAEC's perennial examination malpractices in Ghana, and recommends policy and administrative remedies to improve the conduct of examinations in Ghana and beyond.

THE CONTEXT

Assessment in education forms an important part of improving education quality, as it plays a very definitive and significant role in the curriculum and instructional process. It is believed that, if one wants to discover the truth about an education system, then one must investigate its assessment procedures, as the spirit and style of student/learner assessment defines the de-facto curriculum.^[1] Assessment is said to be the process of determining the extent to which changes in behaviour, towards curricula goals and objectives are taking or have taken place in learners, and thus provides feedback on whether the goals and aspirations of a country's education system are being met.

Based on its type and demands, assessment can serve numerous purposes, mostly geared towards making decisions on learners and the instructional and learning processes. These include, but not limited to, instructional and curriculum management decisions, selection and placement decisions, counselling and guidance decisions, and credentialing and certification decisions. In a standardized achievement test, making these decisions can only be accurate based on the extent to which the assessment processes are valid and reliable. Hence, at any stage of the assessment process, i.e., test constructing, administering, scoring, and result analysis stages, the ultimate priority for the examining body is to minimally reduce measurement errors that may affect the assessment's reliability and validity outcomes.

The conduct of the 2020 WASSCE was, however, characterised by several irregularities that can best be described as unique and widespread, bringing WAEC's credibility to question, and casting more doubt on the validity and reliability of the 2020 WASSCE outcome.

METHODOLOGY

This report is a compendium of Key Informant Interviews with headmasters, teachers, and students of selected Senior High Schools (SHSs), invigilators, examiners, markers, journalists, former management and board members of WAEC. In all, twenty-six (26) stakeholders in the examination value chain were engaged. It is informed by a review of relevant published reports of independent bodies on WAEC's operations and information from online platforms where questions and answers were traded during the 2020 WASSCE. The identities of informants are withheld and subject to non-disclosure.

THE WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATION COUNCIL

In Ghana, WAEC oversees the conduct of Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and WASSCE – both large-scale standardized examinations for final year students in Junior High Schools (JHSs) and SHSs respectively. The Council was established by the legislative assemblies of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia by passing the West Africa Examination Council Ordinance No. 40 in 1952^[2] with a structure divided into three major parts: International committees, National committees, and subcommittees.^[3] This is nationalized with the WAEC Act of 2006 (Act 719).

The Council's activities are run with regular funding from the ministries responsible for education in the member countries and the fees it collects from students for examinations. The funding covers examination activities, planning of program milestones, research and development, and staff training.^[4] In Ghana, WAEC is recognized as a semi-autonomous agency under the MoE with no formal accountability framework beyond government having representation on the WAEC Board.

STANDARDS

According to WAEC as displayed on its official website, it aims, among others, to conduct examinations in the Public Interest and in line with standards consistent with those of British Examining Boards.

The examinations conducted by WAEC are therefore in different categories; International Examinations, National Examinations, Examinations conducted in collaboration with other examining bodies, and Examinations conducted on behalf of other examining bodies. WASSCE falls under the international exams category and is administered in five West African countries – Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and The Gambia. The results of the WASSCE are used for SHS completion certification, which is the basis for admissions into tertiary institutions locally, and in many international jurisdictions. The outcomes of WASSCE are also used by different bodies to evaluate the effectiveness of the nation's second cycle education system. This is why the credibility of the WASSCE examinations is a subject of public concern.

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

As in the other member countries, WAEC's examination value chain has in the past decade witnessed an average increase in the scope and dynamics of examination malpractice. This has usually been greeted with spontaneous public outcry, after which no significant policy action is taken to remedy the causes. The familiarity and regularity of this situation has made examination malpractices an integral part of WAEC's examination.

The Council defines examination malpractice as any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the responsibility of conducting examination in or outside the examination hall, before, during, or after such examination with the aim of taking undue advantage.^[5]

WAEC, in its annual reports on the conduct of WASSCE in Ghana, has noted various forms of examination malpractices that are categorized into the following:

- i. Bringing in foreign materials e.g., pieces of paper, notes, textbooks, handkerchiefs, programmable calculators, etc.
- ii. Irregular activities inside or outside the examination hall e.g., use of mathematical sets, log tables, rulers and calculators to exchange information; exchange of answer scripts; use of 'touts' or 'contractors' to answer questions outside the examination hall.
- iii. Leakage or foreknowledge resulting from improper handling of examination questions during the printing and production process; instruction to supervisors.
- iv. Collusion among candidates and supervisors, e.g., supervisors pretending to be sleeping; some principals deliberately distract supervisors and inspectors to facilitate examination malpractice.
- v. Forging of continuous assessment scores for external candidates.
- vi. Impersonation.
- vii. Markers' malpractices

All these forms of malpractices have been common features in all the WASSCEs conducted by the Council, with the 2020 examination not being an exception. Trend analysis of examination malpractices in WASSCE by the International Final Awards and Examiners' Appointment Committee (IFAEAC) in 2018 shows that, there has been a decline in the various forms of examination fraud since 2014, but sadly, an increasing trend has resumed from 2017, with private schools leading the chart.^[6] The irregularities that characterized the 2020 WASSCE can best be described as the most widespread and unique, as it included not only widespread leakage in questions but also examiners' contacts.

² History. (2004). Retrieved April 12, 2006 from <http://www.waecnigeria.org/gistory.html>

³ Committee structure of the Council. (2004). Retrieved March 27, 2006, from <http://www.ghanawaec.org/about3.html>

⁴ Students Assessment, SABER Country Report 2013 (Ghana)

IRREGULARITIES DURING THE 2020 WASSCE

Two categories of irregularities occurred during the 2020 WASSCE; leakage in examiners' contact details and widespread leakage in examination questions.

Leakage of Examiners' Contact Details

On the 17th of August 2020, our Assessment Desk, as part of normal monitoring functions, intercepted an excel spreadsheet on social media, which contained a total of 1,520 names of WAEC examiners for the WASSCE 2020.

That leaked list had the specific names, schools, subject areas, telephone numbers and email addresses of certified WAEC examiners. Our team took steps to verify the authenticity or otherwise of the said leaked confidential data by personally calling those we knew on the list, including one of our Policy Associates. Our checks unfortunately, confirmed the data; the purported information in circulation on social media, sadly, was an authentic document from WAEC.

Examination Questions Leakage

Almost simultaneously, at around 2:00am on the 17th of August 2020, copies of the Core Mathematics (2) paper were circulating on Social Media. After interception, we reported same to the Police, and conferred with some leaders of the Teacher Unions and members of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education on the matter. Even when quizzed by the media for evidence, we were careful not to publicize the questions as evidence ahead of the examination, since we would have been indulging in the very illegality we were working to avert. After the paper, it emerged that all the questions/items in the said leakage appeared in the examination.

It is worth mentioning that, prior to 2020, almost every allegation of examination leakage had been rejected by WAEC. However, after Africa Education Watch had blown the whistle with compelling evidence made public and submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee on 18th of August 2020, WAEC issued a statement on the 19th of August admitting a leakage in the Core Mathematics (2) paper. After WAEC had admitted the initial leakage, there were ensuing leakages in almost all the papers, apart from Integrated Science and Social Studies, where the leaked papers proved to be fake. Our sources confirmed that WAEC acted timely to change the questions, which is commendable.

The Primary Source of Leaked Examination Papers

The examination value chain begins from the setting of questions by examiners to the opening of sealed, secured envelopes in the examination room. Once set and validated, questions are transported by road to the various WAEC depots at the regional level. The questions are then transported from the WAEC depots under Police escort and thus security to the respective exam centres either on the night prior or at the dawn of the examination day. This depends on the distance between the WAEC depot and the Centre.

In its statement of August 19th, 2020, WAEC indicated that the questions leaked outside their strong room/depot, suggesting the questions were then within the custody of the GES and Police who were responsible for handling the question papers from the depot to the Centre.

Our investigations could not establish the exact stage within the examinations value chain where the leakage occurred. However,

in the attached snapshot of the Economics Paper 2 questions which were leaked at the dawn before the paper was written, a careful examination of the background suggested that, they were taken on an office table with the WAEC orange security wrappers in the background.

(Refer to figure 1).

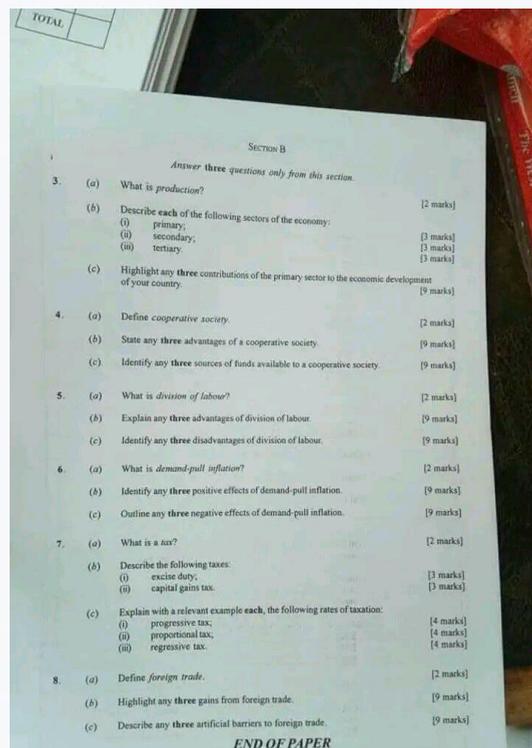


Figure 1

Furthermore, the fact that all questions leaked unto the social media platforms at the dawn before the exam (the very time questions are transported from the WAEC depots) lends some credence to WAEC's position that questions leaked when they were in the custody of the GES/Ghana Police, after they have left their custody (strong rooms). This corroborates a June 2014 police investigative report which cited Lance Corporal Prince Opoku for complicity in leaking examination papers when detailed to escort WAEC examination materials from Konongo depot to examination centres at Asiwa.^[7] It is most likely that shots of questions were taken immediately after moving them from the strong rooms and transmitted through WhatsApp and telegram, which eventually found their way onto the various examination questions trading platforms.

⁵ West African Examination Council (WAEC) Publication on Examination Malpractice (2003).

⁶ International Final Awards and Examiners' Appointment Committee Report. (2018).

⁷ <https://www.myjoyonline.com/waec-disappointed-with-police-over-leakage-of-exam-papers/>

The Secondary Sources of Leaked Examination Papers

Platforms for trading in Questions and Answers - Rogue Social Media Pages

As earlier indicated, our investigations confirmed a telegram page called "HOT STAGE" to be one of the widely patronized sources of leaked examination papers during the 2020 WASSCE. The social media platform, which had 70,000 subscribers at the time of the 2020 WASSCE examinations (now over 160,000 subscribers), released questions and answers at the dawn of the ensuing exams. The platform operators usually released the first batch of questions and answers to paid members much earlier, after which a free version was released in the morning, as late as 7 am, barely an hour to the commencement of examinations. There were other Facebook pages that also serialized questions. They included **"WAEC Secret Room for All Exams"**, **"Free Exam Answers - WAEC"** and **"WAEC Strong Room"**. These pages were used for adverts, after which one was directed to a WhatsApp platform where members were required to pay for questions.

In selected schools where we monitored, students were operating WhatsApp groups where the questions and answers, once ready, were shared. Some teachers we spoke to observed the jubilant mood of most students at dawn, anytime questions and answers arrived, and immediately after examinations, once questions proved genuine. Students, we learnt, contributed to purchase the questions.

It is worth mentioning that, after our initial complaint to the Police about the operations of these rogue social media platforms where 2020 WASSCE questions were traded, it became even more obvious that these social media sites were not new to the security agencies and WAEC. Indeed, WAEC confirmed having reported the said platforms to the Police as far back as 2018 for similar activities. However, information gathered suggested the Police had technical challenges in apprehending the operators, as their IP addresses kept changing.

Malpractices Involving Invigilators

Some invigilators played a role in the WASSCE 2020 malpractices. International best practice provides that teachers should not be used as invigilators. However, this is yet to materialize in Ghana, as the very teachers who have an interest in the examination of their students are used as invigilators.

The potential of conflicting interest needs no emphasis. An example of malpractice involving invigilators was the incident at Kade (Eastern Region) where a Mathematics teacher in Kade Senior High Technical School, Mr. Evans Yeboah, was interdicted by the GES for taking a snapshot of the Integrated Science question paper and sending same outside for an accomplice to solve and smuggle back to him via WhatsApp. According to the GES, he was found dictating the solutions on the phone to the candidates [8].

In another incident, the media also reported nine (9) WAEC supervisors and a dispatcher who were arrested for their roles in leaking question papers. The dispatcher was to deliver exam papers to seven examination centres along his route. At the Christ Ambassador School of Excellence in Dansoman, Accra, which was the first centre on his route, he, together with the supervisors' connivance, took photos of the question papers and shared them to a WhatsApp group.^[9]

OTHER IRREGULARITIES

Delayed Release of the Full WASSCE Results

The persistent delayed release of some results is a practice that requires mention and remedy. Like any other year, WAEC did not release the **FULL RESULTS** of the candidates who sat for the 2020 WASSCE.

In its statement of 13th November 2020, it indicated it had withheld the results of over 60,000 students from 122 SHSs. This represented an increase of 33.3% from the number of results withheld in 2019. The reason WAEC adduced was that the affected candidates were suspected of various cases of examination malpractices.

While it is instructive to note that Eduwatch is not against the scrutiny of scripts to ascertain suspicions of examination malpractices and exact sanctions on those found culpable, we have issues with unjustified delays in the investigative process. This is because, in previous years, innocent candidates have been eventually denied their right to enrol in a tertiary institution in the year of examination due to WAEC's own delays in investigating alleged malpractices leading to the withholding of their results beyond the admission deadlines of tertiary institutions.

In a previous instance, Ideal College (Madina) had to secure a court order to compel WAEC to release their results. Despite several lawsuits against WAEC by these victims, WAEC eventually ends up releasing these results at their own time. In view of the obvious impunity, there seems to be no end in sight to this slow-paced investigative process of WAEC and the delayed release of some results, especially from private SHSs. In other jurisdictions, investigations into alleged malpractices are completed before releasing all results.

On 15th November 2020, Eduwatch petitioned the Minister of Education on this matter, appealing to him to intervene by ensuring WAEC releases the said results in real-time, to enable those who will eventually qualify for tertiary admissions in the 2020/21 academic year to progress in January 2021. Subsequently, WAEC began releasing some of the delayed results, with some as usual delaying beyond the end of tertiary admissions in January 2021.

⁸GBC Ghana Online. (2020). Retrieved August 6, 2020, from <http://www.gbcghanaonline.com/news/education/waec-investigates-alleged-exam-malpractices-in-WASSCE>.

⁹Graphic Online. (2020). Retrieved August 5, 2020 from <http://www.graphic.com.gh/news/education/wassce-teacher-interdicted-for-exam-malpractice>.

Students' revolt over strict invigilation

Aside the examination malpractices, there were several incidences of violence and chaos that marred the conduct of the 2020 WASSCE. Students of Tweneboa Kodua SHS in Kumawu in the Ashanti Region threatened to boycott the examination for what they termed "strict" supervision by their school authorities during the final paper.^[10]

Students at Bright Senior High School in Kukurantumi (Eastern Region) beat up WASSCE invigilators over "strict invigilation" and observation of social distancing protocols in the examination hall. A journalist with the Daily Graphic was also beaten with his phone and bag taken away by the students. They equally thrashed phones belonging to the invigilators.^[11] A similar incident was recorded in Only Believe Senior High School, a private school in Akyem Kukurantumi (Eastern Region).

HOW THE LEAKAGE OF EXAMINERS CONTACT DETAILS AFFECTS THE CREDIBILITY OF EXAMINATIONS

According to WAEC, it aims to undertake assessments in line with the British Standards of Assessments, by awarding certificates that do not represent lower standards of attainment than equivalent certificates of examining authorities in the United Kingdom.^[12] The United Kingdom Standards of External Assessments as affirmed by the Office of Qualification and Assessment (OFQUAL); the United Kingdom regulator of examination bodies requires a non-disclosure of the contact details of external examiners (markers).

In the aftermath of the leaked contacts, WAEC held a press conference where it explained to the public that the leaked contacts were only provisional. WAEC went on to assure that it had over 20,000 markers it could choose from, thereby suggesting the final list would exclude the 1,520 leaked contacts. The above notwithstanding, WAEC reneged on their assurance to the public and went ahead to use the same markers on the leaked contacts list to mark the scripts of the 2020 WASSCE.

This, in our reasonable assessment, amounted to compromising the United Kingdom Standards of Assessments WAEC purports to uphold.

¹⁰Graphic Online. (2020). Retrieved August 5, 2020 from <http://www.graphic.com.gh/news/education/wassce-teacher-interdicted-for-exam-malpractice>.

¹¹GhanaWeb. (2020). Retrieved August 7, 2020, from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/riotios-bright-shs-students-beat-wassce-invigilators-journalist-over-strict-supervision-1027675>

¹²<https://www.waecgh.org/about-us>

ACTIONS TAKEN SO FAR BY EDUWATCH

High Court Suit

The breach of the Non-Disclosure convention between WAEC and their markers compromised the standard of the 2020 WASSCE examinations. In response, Eduwatch filed an injunction writ at an Accra High Court seeking to restrain WAEC from proceeding to use the markers whose contacts had been leaked. This was because even though WAEC has in a press conference assured the public that the integrity of the exam would not be comprised by the leakage of examiners contacts since it had many other examiners apart from the 1,520 whose contacts were leaked, they had 'silently' invited the same 1,520 invigilators for regional pre-marking conference. Even before the application was heard, WAEC proceeded to use the same examiners for the marking.

Petition to Parliament with copies to the Minister of Education

In view of the above irregularities, Eduwatch petitioned the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and the Minister of Education to:

- i. Probe the circumstances leading to the leakage of the questions.
- ii. Probe the circumstances leading to the leakage of confidential identity contacts of the examiners and markers.
- iii. Cause WAEC not to use the said examiners for marking, since leakage of their identities could likely impact on their independence and impartiality.

Although this petition was submitted to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on 18th August 2020, we are yet to be informed of any action, or receive a formal response to our petition. Our checks from the Committee confirm the issue was not even deliberated on by the Committee, even though the Chair publicly confirmed on radio [Joy FM Newsnight] that he had indeed received our petition.

THE RAMIFICATION OF WIDESPREAD EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

Standardized assessment, measures the attainment of a country's educational goal and aspiration with the outcome guiding education policy. Hence,

when the evidence from the assessment is compromised, it leads to an invalid and unreliable measurement that could potentially impact the country's education and human capital development policy choices.

Globally, there is a challenge of job-skill mismatch, partly attributed to candidates who do not demonstrate the abilities professed by their academic certificates. That is because of the use of foul means by some candidates, to pass their examinations, without having the requisite knowledge and skills they were tested on.

Ghana stands at the precipice of a degenerated situation of underdevelopment if its youth rely on fake means of passing their exams, without acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective and productive at work. It is therefore, not surprising that we are having a situation of employers having little or no faith in school certificates as a demonstration of human capital. As J. Jossiter and K. Abreh (2020) noted, this could have "macro implications for the labour market and the economy as a whole".

The WASSCE certificate will lose its credibility and acceptance locally and internationally if nothing is urgently done to improve the credibility of WAEC's assessment systems. It is WAEC's vision to become a world-class examining body by "developing and administering examinations that are both valid and relevant to the educational aspirations of member countries; awarding certificates that are credible, and promotes the ideals of hard work and honesty in the youth through the recognition and celebration of excellence".^[13] Therefore, the annual challenges that surround the conduct of the WASSCE, and more specifically, WASSCE 2020 should be an issue of grave concern to the Council and the Government of Ghana.

Reaction from MoE/GES on the widespread leakages

In spite of the huge public outcry and media prominence given to the widespread leakage of examination papers and contact details of markers, leading to various statements issued by CSOs, including Teacher Unions, Networks and Coalitions, NGOs, Members of Parliament etc., there was no official statement by the MoE or GES; not even after WAEC had issued a statement to admit the allegation. In this instance,

the MoE did not just fail to exhibit concern publicly about the widespread leakage of examiners' contacts and questions, but also fell short in exercising their oversight responsibility of ensuring WAEC delivers a malpractices-free and credible examination of Ghanaian students.

However, immediately after the release of the WASSCE results, the GES issued a statement touting the government's achievement in scoring the highest pass rate in the WASSCE with the first batch of the free SHS programme. This was published unedited in several full-paged adverts in the National Dailies and on major media platforms.

Going forward, Ghana needs a clear-cut delineation of duties/functions between the MoE/GES - as the policy maker/service provider and the WAEC - the external examiner and the pseudo evaluator of GES. This is the basis for our call for the establishment of an independent authority to license, accredit and quality assure examinations agencies and their works in the country. Such a move will go a long way to enhance the credibility and acceptance of results of examinations in the country, and the performance of learners in our education system to improve the quality of the system.

¹³The West African Examination Council. Revised Convention Establishing the West African Examinations Council (2003).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WAEC, GES AND MoE

The relationship between the MoE and the Ghana Education Service (GES), on one hand, and WAEC, on the other hand, is contractual, with the MoE and GES being the clients and WAEC, the service provider. This means the MoE has contracted WAEC to undertake final external examinations for basic and secondary school students who have not only been taught by GES, but whose assessment outcomes is an interest of the GES. However, on the WAEC Governing Committee sits the GES Director General as Vice Chair. Thus,

in the arrangement where WAEC ultimately conducts the major external test of the outcomes of GES's work, the presence of GES's Director General on WAEC's Governing Committee is seen by some as potentially conflicting.

The above position is being held in view of the fact that when it comes to issues of external assessment; the GES in one breath, as a member of the Governing Committee of WAEC, is interested in providing oversight to ensure the highest standards of examinations by WAEC, and in another, has its ultimate interest in the achievement of quality/higher students' performance in the examinations conducted by WAEC. This is because, one of the major indicators for assessing the quality of work or efficiency of GES, by the public, is the BECE and WASSCE pass rates. Invariably, one needs no education on the impact of widespread examination question leakages on student performance, as it obviously enhances the attainment of higher pass rates of students in such an examination. The credit in this case, no matter how flawed the picture of performance it paints, ultimately goes to the GES, the teaching service provider. The other question is, to what extent can the GES/MoE hold WAEC accountable for their poor output, when the GES is part of the governance of WAEC?

WAEC AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

WAEC, MoE and Parliament

Apart from being a semi-autonomous agency under the MoE, WAEC is a contractor engaged by the Ministry to administer pre-tertiary assessments to its citizens. WAEC has operated under no regulator, neither is it sufficiently accountable to any external body within a clearly defined legal and policy framework. The Ministry's presence on the WAEC board has not yielded any accountability dividend, as they have superintended over the inefficiencies witnessed over the years. The oversight of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education over all agencies of government is generic, and hardly goes into the operational and technical issues relating to compliance and standards. It is therefore not surprising that during these years of examination leakages, Parliament had been silent on reforming WAEC.

Due to this, WAEC has always investigated and cleared itself of any wrongdoing and continues to be a judge in its own court. From September to date, the Ghanaian public is unaware of the outcome of investigations WAEC claimed it was conducting into the leakage of the examiners contact details from its headquarters. In addition, no one is informed of any investigations/outcome in relation to the persons responsible for the widespread leakage of questions between the WAEC examination depots and the Examination Centres.

Prosecution fatigue

Too often, the assumption is that persons cited for criminal acts are not made to face the full rigours of the law. That could mostly be the case, especially when the Registrar's Annual Report to the Council in 2013 indicated that, "the war against examination fraud has assumed criminal dimensions and is too **stressful, dangerous and expensive for examining bodies to prosecute alone.**"^[14] As cited earlier, in 2014, WAEC publicly complained about the failure of the Police Service/Attorney General Department to prosecute a police officer who was found complicit in an examination questions leakage scandal in Konongo. This does not only further raise the question of who watches the watchman, but also the commitment of the State to exact accountability on public officers involved in the examination leakage business.

No matter the stress level in prosecuting culprits and the cost involved, bringing culprits to book to serve as a deterrent must be a non-negotiable priority for WAEC, the MoE and the Attorney General if Ghana is serious about credible external assessments of its students.

WAEC and Regulatory Compliance

Presently, WAEC sets its own standards, appraises itself and provides its own quality assurance within the monopoly it has been enjoying in the public basic and secondary assessments sector. This is against international best practices in assessments which require examining bodies to have regulators responsible for accreditation, setting standards, ensuring compliance, and quality assurance. Such a body should have an office of public complaints where allegations of examinations malpractices shall be lodged, investigated and sanctions applied, if necessary. In the United Kingdom, for instance, whose standards WAEC aims to achieve, there is an Office of Qualifications and Assessment (OFQUAL) whose duty is to set and enforce assessment and examination standards. It sanctions non-compliance, including revocation of licenses, while regulating competition in the assessments sector.

¹⁴The West African Examinations Council. (2013). Registrar's Annual Report to Council

The WAEC Monopoly

As mentioned earlier, WAEC is a contractor engaged by the MoE to administer pre-tertiary assessments to Ghanaian students. No section of the WAEC Act of 2006 (Act 719) confers a monopoly over the conduct of pre-tertiary assessment in Ghana. It is the considered opinion of many stakeholders engaged in compiling this report that, among the fundamental causes of WAEC's perennial inefficiencies is the monopoly they have enjoyed in conducting public pre-tertiary assessments since the 1950s. Understandably, against the evidence that healthy competition breeds effectiveness, efficiency and quality in the production/provision of goods and services, and with evidence from the competitive international pre-tertiary examinations in the private sector of Ghana's education system, the facts suggest that competition breeds efficiency, as there is hardly any report of exam question leakages in the conduct of International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), International Bachelorette (IB) etc., even though questions arrive in the country weeks before examinations.

Assessment experts posit that, it is feasible to invite reputable assessment bodies to compete with WAEC within the same space, using the same curriculum but adopting different methods and systems of assessments under the same standards. In that case, students may choose which examinations to sit for, after undergoing tuition by the same teachers using the same curriculum.

On-going Initiatives to Improve WAEC's System Credibility

It is important to recognize some of the efforts and measures the Council has taken over the years to address examination malpractices prior to WASSCE 2020. These include, among others:

- i. The use of metal detectors at some centres to detect and prevent the use of mobile phones in the examination halls.
- ii. The introduction of security features in the issuing of WASSCE certificates to prevent the use of fake result slips for admission to higher education institutions.
- iii. The use of ICT tools (Item Differential Profile Software) to detect examination malpractice among candidates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a CSO operating in the education space, Eduwatch has a responsibility of being part of the solution. Accordingly, part of this report is devoted to policy and operational recommendations that can contribute to reforming WAEC's operations and governance. To address the flaws and improve the large-scale pre-tertiary assessment process, we recommend the following:

- 1. Investigate and Prosecute Offenders:** The MoE must work with WAEC, Ghana Police Service and the Attorney-General to commission/expedite action on criminal investigations into reported irregularities at the 2020 WASSCE, especially the leakage of examiners contacts from WAEC's Headquarters, and the leakage of questions as admitted by WAEC. Making public such prosecuting serves as a deterrent to potential offenders.
- 2. Regulate WAEC:** The MoE must set up a Regulator of Assessments, like OFQUAL in the United Kingdom. The Body would provide quality assurance, standards enforcement, and grant/revoke licenses to examining bodies, including WAEC, based on the quality of their assessment practices, including the security of questions. Such a body should have an office of public complaints where allegations of examination malpractices shall be lodged, investigated with the necessary sanctions applied if required. Alternatively, the mandate of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment could be amended to include regulating assessment bodies, and same elevated to the status of an Authority.
- 3. Break the WAEC Monopoly:** *Presently, there are several international examining bodies operating in the pre-tertiary education space, specifically in the private sector. These groups' reputations are not in question as one hardly hears of any leakage in examination papers. Our recommendation is that, it is long overdue for Ghana to consider inviting some healthy competition in the Public Pre-Tertiary Examinations Sector to improve standards under the proposed Regulator of Assessments.*
- 4. Digitize the question distribution system:** WAEC must reduce the human element in the question value chain, especially from the strong room to the examination centres. We recommend an internet-based encrypted email system which sends questions 30 minutes ahead of the commencement of examinations, by which time all candidates should be seated. Questions are then printed in the open at the Centre, and shared. With the provision of Wi-Fi in all SHSs, this recommendation is achievable in the short to medium term.
- 5. Reinforce Ban on the Use of Mobile Phones:** Efforts to curb examination irregularities must begin with disrupting the supply chain for questions through breaking social media communication between question merchants and students. Thus, the ban on the use of mobile phones must be reinforced by schools, since they were used as the main medium to transfer questions to students.

6. **Strengthen and publicize prosecutions:** WAEC must strengthen its prosecution efforts through increased collaboration with the Ghana Police Service and the Economic and Organized Crime Office, while publicizing prosecutions of persons found culpable of participating in criminal acts within the examination value chain, including the Police.
7. **Divorce GES/MoE from the WAEC's Governing Committee:** The MoE must review the necessary legal and policy instruments to redefine the relationship between government and WAEC by divorcing MoE/GES representatives from sitting on the Governing Councils of WAEC and grant the examining body the independence it requires. This will reduce any potential for conflict of interest.
8. **Engage external consultants to speed up investigations into alleged malpractices:** *WAEC must engage external consultants to speed up the process of investigating malpractices involving candidates. This would further ensure the results of innocent candidates are released together with the entire cohort.*
9. **MoE should ensure timely release of funds to WAEC:** It is also the case that the government at times delays in paying its financial contribution to the Council and runs into arrears. For the Council to be effective, timely release of funds by respective governments, including Ghana, is essential. It would ensure the Council carries out the requisite systemic reforms to improve/strengthen its service delivery efficiency and credibility.
10. **Review Assessment Methods:** There is the need to look at the entire assessment system and develop an Assessment Framework that prioritizes and strengthens school-based assessment. The framework should direct assessment towards more authentic and meaningful learning outcomes, where learners will be invited to exhibit what they know and can do through the solving of worthwhile problems. Currently, there is no system-level document that guides school-based assessment; therefore, test outcomes are mostly invalid and unreliable. This has led to the over-reliance on external test-based and measurement-driven assessments by WAEC, which come with the same validity and reliability challenges, for grading students. We believe that changing the nature and demands of assessments to more authentic modes alone, will be a big step towards minimising the canker of examination malpractices in the country.
11. **Conduct nationwide anti examination malpractices campaign:** Candidates' demand for illegal examination questions on the black market and the connivance of professionals like the Police, teachers, including heads of schools, only explains the moral decadence in the Ghanaian society. In that light, a campaign against examination fraud must be embraced by all, with frontline roles played by Parent Associations, moral society, media and CSOs.

CONCLUSION

The credibility of WAEC's examination systems is important in determining/defining the quality of Ghana's education system. The adoption and observance of international assessment standards is critical to sustaining WAEC's and the WASSCE's credibility. However, acts like leakage of markers contact details and questions have strong potential to reduce the credibility of WAEC's assessment systems and standards, and by extension, the credibility and recognition of the WASSCE certificate. The absence of a Regulator of Assessments that ensures WAEC's compliance to international standards creates a vacuum in institutional accountability and the observance of quality assurance in assessment standards.

The malpractices, violence and chaos that characterized the 2020 WASSCE examinations are only symptoms of system deficiencies that have been either overlooked or swept under the carpet for many years. Anything short of a holistic reform of our assessment system only provides maximum assurance of the recurrence of similar if not worse malpractices in 2021 and beyond. The onus lies on the MoE to choose between the timely nursing of a curable sore and the continued delusion of its absence until it becomes an incurable cancer.

THE 2020 WASSCE REPORT

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