



## **Effect Of Enforcement of Exams Malpractice on the Standard of SSCE in Taraba**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

The persistent incidence of examination malpractice in some secondary schools in Taraba State has continued to undermine the integrity and credibility of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Despite various measures put in place to curb these malpractices, the problem remains widespread, prompting the need to assess the effectiveness of WAEC's examination administration in improving examination standards in the state. The primary objective of the study is to examine the extent to which WAEC's examination administration, particularly the enforcement of penalties for examination malpractice, has enhanced the quality and standard of SSCE candidates in Taraba State. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected using Google-based questionnaires and interviews. The study population comprised lecturers and students from three tertiary institutions in Taraba State, as well as the Head of Examinations at WAEC Jalingo and other examiners in the state, bringing the total population to 479 respondents. A sample size of 231 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, with an additional 10% added to account for non-responses, resulting in 228 valid responses used for analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed that WAEC's enforcement mechanisms significantly explain improvements in examination standards in Taraba State. The study concludes that maintaining high examination standards is essential for producing competent graduates capable of contributing meaningfully to national development. It recommends stricter enforcement of penalties and the adoption of technologies such as biometric verification and surveillance systems to curb malpractice and enhance examination integrity.

**Key Words: Enforcement, Malpractice, Standard**



## 1. Introduction

The exhibition and practical application of knowledge through the vehicle of education has been one of the sustaining forces that keeps human race going from one generation to another. Not only pronounced in areas of creativity and innovative ideas, education teaches skills and helps individuals to broaden their horizons, gain better perspective, and broadens individuals thinking. Different people and nations across the world today have been able to effect change and improvements in their various areas of endeavors through increased access to education around the world, which in turn has made society more accepting and open-minded (Bello, Uduh, & Kolajo 2010). In like manner, education encourages thinking and experimenting with new ideas largely designed through the framework of the school system.

Denga & Denga (1998) observed that the school educational system is a fulcrum on which all other developmental facets are hinged. To Kolawole (2010), proper school education deals with the balanced development of the cognitive (intellectual), affective (emotional/feeling, ethical, moral) and psychomotor (practical) domains of an individual and not the development of one aspect of the individual at the expense of others and that when an individual has acquired a balanced dimension, he or she can exhibit the expected behavioral effectiveness and knowledge application. To this, it becomes important to always find out the extent to which the learners have acquired the theoretical and practical skills needed for both personal and national development by the instrumentality of examination.

Standards are required in the conduct of examination anywhere in the world including Nigeria ranging from registration of candidates, accreditation, evaluation of examination centres not only as a measure of quality assurance but also as a means for internal and external check modalities of examination body. Logistics management is also ensured; the movement and keeping of examination materials to avoid compromise as well as supervision through diligent officials and supervisors mostly drawn from participating schools to fretful possibilities of sabotage or any form of examination malpractice. The examination body in Nigeria has punitive measure tied to different cases as well as written penalties for examination



malpractice if breached at any time. The lack of enforcement of these penalties or effective administrative checks to ensure standards will not only erode but undermines the process and even question certification awarded at the end of the day.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

With regards to this, Odidi, (2014), Aworinde (2015) observe that the compulsion attached to certificates as a requirement for admission into tertiary institutions before one is offered a job or seeking benefits from any opportunity, and seeking political office besides the premium placed on certificate stimulates many examination candidates to engage in desperate and corrupt attempts to compromise the integrity of the examination, by perpetrating different forms of malpractice to unduly secure favourable grades instead of reading hard.

In some schools in Taraba state, for example, the cheating process has now been institutionalized to the extent students have grown so notorious in examination malpractice. Additionally, these schools even have a reputation among the public as a "one-stop solution" for success during SSCE examination that parents, teachers, principals, school owners, etc. drive the examination fraud in such centres. These schools have indeed evolved into a form of organized crime group or a group of corrupt syndicates who pervert the examination system/processes for their private gains. From another dimension, schools that facilitate cheating are commonly known as "miracle examination centres" (MECs) or special centres, since they could even deliver excellent results to candidates who have very poor literacy skills (Aworinde, 2015, Onyedinefu, 2019).

Doubtless, this practices have increased over time due to permissive supervision or lack of sincere synergy between the schools and the examination body to the extent that in 2017, the Taraba Ministry of Education queried 14 secondary school principals over their schools' involvement in examination malpractice by the West African School Examination Council (Aworinde, 2015). However, the popularity of examination malpractice in some schools in Taraba state facilitated by MECs and its resulting consequences on the education system as reflected in the reduction of the competence of human resources and perpetuation of unfairness, have resulted in the emergence of interventions to deal with the issue (Atueyi, 2019, Belo-Osagie, 2017). Government authorities and examination regulatory bodies in the



state have responded in various ways to the problem of endemic examination malpractices which MECs have gone ahead to institutionalized in order to promote examination integrity by the enforcement of the Examination Malpractice Act by criminalizing examination malpractice and specific jail terms and fines for offenders. Our basic concern here is to find out why schools have become adamant in spite of serious checks put in place to forestall the situation by stakeholders.

This study is an attempt to determine the extent to which enforcement of examination malpractice penalties by WAEC has promoted the standard of SSCE?

### **Hypothesis to be tested states that**

The enforcement of penalties for malpractice have not significantly promoted the standard of examination conducted by WAEC in Taraba state.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

### **Concept of Standard of SSCE**

Standards have been described by many authors like (Mhonta, Sihlabela & Gamedze, 2004) as an established model of what is right, which everybody is expected to follow in the practice of an art. It is a common language in almost all facets of life guiding activities that are regarded as following the norm or required process. The test development process of any standardized or high stake exams (Hopkins, 1998) such as the Nigeria's Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) is faced, with 'assessment challenge' (Broadfoot, 2002). In considering the standard of SSCE especially the one conducted by WAEC the first consideration is to note that subjects for SSCE have different features, each having its own realm of meaning and forms of knowledge distinct from others. Furthermore, The SSCE is a public examination and from every indication a norm-referenced test. Accordingly, Zubayr (2014) has asserted that most public examinations (including SSCE) are norm referenced tests and that the raw scores from such examinations are almost meaningless. Usually therefore, raw scores need further treatment before they are ready for consumption. This treatment is usually referred to as standardization. In addition, the 9 numerical scales (A1 - F9) which is used to report performance in the SSCE has been in use for a very long time and was used for reporting the school certificate and GCE „O“ Level examinations prior 1988. The use of this scale for SSCE



is seems adequate more so in terms of value as there is not much difference between the GCE ordinary Level and SSCE except for the beefing up of the contents of the syllabus. The SSCE performs the same function as GCE „O“ Level; for example, preparation for world of work and tertiary education (Zubayr, 2014).

### **Concept of Examination**

According to William (2013), Examination is defined as the evaluation of the understanding of the knowledge of a person. The assessment can be done in the form of a formal test. The exam is taken to check the knowledge of a student of a particular subject. According to him, the exam includes a variety of questions like objective, subjective, one-word, etc. Each question in the exam is assigned marks according to the level of knowledge it requires. The students are required to attempt the questions asked in exams. Marks are given based on the quality of answers given by a student in their examination. Evaluation is done on the basis of marks obtained in the exam. To this end, Jonah (2015) maintain that different exams are being conducted at different levels. The exams conducted in schools and colleges test students' knowledge of all the subjects being taught. Schools and colleges conduct entrance exams to give admission to the institute based on knowledge. Schools and colleges conduct intermediate exams, however, the final exams to evaluate the knowledge of the student.

According to Azimiroshan (2016), examination must be reliable before it can serve its purpose. To this end, for the public at large, there are, basically only two senses in which examination reliability matters. The first is that the grades which candidates receive from a particular examination should be exactly the grades they deserve, not one grade higher nor one grade lower. Operationally, this means that, were the examination to be repeated, candidates would emerge with the same grades. The second is that this should happen consistently year after year. Not only do candidates get the grades which they deserve now, but their successors must also get their just rewards. These actually raise issues of both reliability and validity and in reviewing the concept of examination, it is inevitable to explore a little of the interaction of these two pillars as it affects examinations. Accordingly, Baiard et. al (2014) assert that every examination at a given time is likely to test only a sample of what the candidates or students are expected to know since it is difficult to include questions from all the aspects of the syllabus or curriculum; this is called the domain of the assessment



in examination. To this end, although a grade is gained as a result of an individual's performance on the domain of assessment for a particular occasion may not mean that the candidate or student has properly assimilated every aspect of the syllabus or he or she is good in all the topics. This could also mean that if topics other than the ones that appeared in the examination were taken, the reflexion of students' performance or candidates' performance may change. Otherwise, it is widely assumed that the same grade should be obtained if other samples or topics were used to form the assessment questions in the examination.

From the foregoing, the validity of examination determines the quality of candidates or students even as it has to do with the extent to which the responses to a particular assessment can be more widely generalized. According to William (2003; 2004; 2006), the inferences which may be made within the examination assessment domain will depend on the extent to which it is sufficiently extensive. He then points out that the domain for any test may have consequences beyond its construct validity. Thus, the emphasis put on examination components (whether there are closed or open response questions or how much coursework there is) or the emphasis put on certain topics or on the assessment of certain skills, go a long way to defining a subject or a syllabus and a set of values associated with these. A particular test may be used to emphasize certain values independently of considerations of reliability. Beyond the chosen domain of examination as a way of assessment are the consequences which then follow for individuals, schools and others.

### **Enforcement of Penalties against Examination Malpractice**

Oyekan (2016) sees the enforcement of penalties against examination malpractice as something that is not limited to the effort of examination bodies but an all-inclusive collaboration of all the stake holders such as the teachers, invigilators, examination administrators which include the invigilators, supervisors, teachers, examination bodies and security personnel. Accordingly, Olushola (2015) Maintained that, it is certain that at any point that any of the stakeholders below allow unethical practices or conduct it individually or collectively examination malpractice will result.



## Examination Bodies

These include accredited bodies that set and handle examinations such as West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO). Unethical practices of such bodies sometimes include violation and disregard of examination process. Such violation and disregard for examination best practices include but may not be limited to the following:

rooms, hall or examination venues resulting into cramped venues, haphazard sitting arrangements, loss of adequate control over the examinees, insufficient number of invigilators leading to overworking the few and poor invigilation, shortage of question papers and other examination materials. Often time's students and candidates do not know their examination numbers and centers until the day

of examination. These anomalies and lapses create the platform for cheating in examination.

b. Lack of accountability in the conduct of examination. Examination bodies do not require accountability in the conduct of examinations. The examination officials are not monitored and accountable for their activities during examinations. It has become such that they perpetrate unethical practices in examination management with impunity. At this time of writing the West African Examination Council examination for secondary school student is going on. My ward in the secondary school exam near my university Babcock University is asking from me money the school authorities and examination supervisors want them to contribute in other to be helped with the answers in critical subjects as English and Mathematics. You would be shocked to know that teachers who claim to have taught these students are the same people collecting money to supply answers in the examinations they are invigilating. It often times degenerate to the extent where answers to exam questions are written on the board for students to copy. This type of illegality cannot go on where accountability is demanded in any system. Sometimes Examination bodies and schools shy away from meting appropriate discipline and sanction to erring teachers and staff in this regard. Though many school administrators gloss over this for fear of attack by those involved and the cult groups influencing the teachers, it is not a strong ground to allow the menace of examination malpractice.



## **Review on Enforcement of Penalty against Examination Malpractice and standard of Examination**

Okwilagwe and Nwazota (2010) carried an Analysis of National Examinations on Senior School Certificate Examination Questions in two Core Subjects. The study was an analysis of content coverage of Junior School Certificate Examination Syllabi by National Examinations Council Papers in Two Core Subject. The extent to which item on the test represent Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (cognitive domain) was also analysed to see if there was inappropriateness that could warrant frustration and examination malpractice among the students. The ex-post facto research design was adopted in the study. Examination syllabi for Social Studies and Integrated Science and question papers for a three-year period were collected and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Findings indicated that NECO JSCE Integrated Science and Social Studies questions cover between 50% and 60% of the examination syllabi. Most of the areas not adequately covered were very relevant to everyday life. Generally, Social Studies multiple choice items were easy but in 2001 and 2003 the essay items were difficult as 33% and 40% were at the application level respectively. Integrated Science multiple choice questions and essay questions for 2004 were difficult as they covered 30% and 46% application level respectively. In view of the findings, it was suggested that to meet the standard of NECO questions, the subject teachers should develop in students the skills and strategies for answering higher order questions to keep pace with the changing patterns of questions presentation. The study did not use primary instrument of data collection but limited itself to content analysis. This study is different because it is not focusing on JSSCE but SSCE by WAEC, also it is different in terms of methodology as it will use primary instrument of data collection to get primary data which will give practical and reliable insight on the variables.

Okoye and Nwafor (2009) carried out a study on A Comparison of SSCE Questions Set by the West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Council, Nigeria. The purpose of this study was to compare the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) essay questions set by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) in terms of how much they were distributed across the various levels of the cognitive domain and the incidence of malpractices. To this effect, the essay



question papers set by WAEC and NECO in Biology, Chemistry and Economics in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 were obtained. These questions were analysed by three experts in Measurement and Evaluation in terms of how many of them fell under the various levels of the cognitive domain and how it affects the tendency of cheating or not.

The result showed that for both examining bodies, most of the questions were knowledge and comprehension questions. When the distributions of the questions across the various levels of the cognitive domain, set by WAEC and NECO were compared, no significant difference was obtained. The conclusion therefore is that, as far as the distribution of questions across the levels of the cognitive domain is concerned, WAEC and NECO are similar and the questions were not difficult to warrant examination malpractices. The study focused on subject difference in its comparison but this study is focusing on the examining body and their administrative processes and activities in the conduct of the examination.

### **1.3 Methodology**

This study adopted the mixed method research design for data collection, using a combination of structured questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews. Total number of population of the staff is 479. The Head of Exams administration in WAEC office in the state was interviewed. Therefore, using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling formula, the sample size was arrived at 210. However, in order to provide for error that may occur by respondents, 10 per cent were added to calculate the sample size as suggested by Israel (2013). Thus, the sample size is 231. The primary data was collected through interview and questionnaire administration, while secondary data was received through journals, newspapers, and textbooks. For the purpose of testing the hypotheses, Multiple Regression was applied in analyzing the hypotheses of this research and how they determine the standard of SSCE.

### **1.4 Result and Discussion**

The findings of the study were based on data collected through questionnaire and interview. The hypotheses were tested and the findings analyzed.



**Table 1.1 Questionnaire Distribution**

Categories	No. of Questionnaire administered	No. Returned	Percentage Returned	Percentage Not Returned	Invalid Questionnaire	Valid Questionnaire
Staff of both private and public schools	231	228	98	2	0	228
Total	231	228	98	2	0	228

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Distribution and response rate of questionnaires administered to senior secondary staff in both private and public schools within the 16 selected secondary schools across the three senatorial districts in Taraba State. Out of 231 questionnaires distributed, 228 were returned, resulting in a high response rate of 98%. This leaves a minimal non-response rate of 2%. Notably, all returned questionnaires were deemed valid, as there were no invalid questionnaires reported due to the goggle format questionnaire used. This high return and validity rate indicate a robust and reliable data collection process, reflective of the engaged participation of the secondary school staff in the study. The data sourced from the field survey conducted in 2024 provides a comprehensive basis for analyzing the perspectives of senior secondary staff on the subject under investigation.

### 1.5 Research Question

- i. To what extent has the enforcement of examination malpractice penalties by WAEC promoted the integrity of senior secondary certificate examination in Taraba state?



**Table 1.2. Cancellation of results of cases of malpractice serve as deterrent to candidates in WAEC exams.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Disagree	6	2.6	2.6
	Undecide	5	2.2	4.8
Valid	Agree	116	50.9	55.7
	Strongly Agree	101	44.3	100.0
	Total	228	100.0	100.0

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2025

Table 1.2 presents the responses of senior secondary staff regarding whether the cancellation of results in cases of malpractice serves as a deterrent to candidates in WAEC exams. Out of 228 respondents, a majority of 50.9% agreed and 44.3% strongly agreed with the statement, resulting in a combined total of 95.2% in favor. Only 2.6% disagreed, and 2.2% were undecided. These findings suggest that the majority of senior secondary staff believe that the enforcement of result cancellations in cases of malpractice effectively deters candidates from engaging in dishonest practices. This indicates that such penalties are perceived as a strong measure to promote the integrity of the senior secondary certificate examination in Taraba State, supporting the overall credibility and fairness of the examination process.

**Table 1.3. De-recognition of exams centres by WAEC make schools to discourage malpractice among candidates.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Disagree	4	1.8	1.8
Valid	Undecided	10	4.4	6.1
	Agree	132	57.9	64.0



Strongly Agree	82	36.0	36.0	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2025

Table 1.3 presents the responses of senior secondary staff regarding whether the de-recognition of exam centers by WAEC encourages schools to discourage malpractice among candidates. Out of 228 respondents, a majority of 57.9% agreed and 36.0% strongly agreed with the statement, resulting in a combined total of 93.9% in favor. Only 1.8% disagreed, and 4.4% were undecided. These findings suggest that majority of senior secondary staff believe that the threat of de-recognition by WAEC is an effective deterrent, motivating schools to actively discourage malpractice among their candidates. This implies that such measures are perceived as crucial for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the examination process, ensuring that schools uphold high standards of conduct during exams. Be that as it may, during an interview with head of exams he said that in 2018, 8 schools were derecognized, in 2019, 11, 2020 21, 2021 4, 2022 60, 2023 40, and 2024, 4 which serves as deterrent to other school in the state.

**Table 1.4. The prohibition of candidates who come late to after the commencement of exams promote commitment among SSCE candidates.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	9	3.9	3.9	3.9
Undecide	8	3.5	3.5	7.5
Valid Agree	119	52.2	52.2	59.6
Strongly Agree	92	40.4	40.4	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2025

Table 1.4 presents the responses of senior secondary staff regarding whether the prohibition of candidates who arrive late after the commencement of exams promotes commitment among SSCE candidates. Out of 228 respondents, a majority of 52.2% agreed and 40.4% strongly agreed with the statement, resulting in a combined total of 92.6% in favor. Only 3.9% disagreed, and 3.5% were undecided. These findings suggest that the majority of senior secondary staff believe that prohibiting late-arriving candidates from participating in exams



effectively promotes punctuality and commitment among SSCE candidates. This policy is perceived as an important measure to ensure that students understand the importance of time management and adhere to examination schedules, thereby fostering a more disciplined and responsible approach to their academic responsibilities.

**Table 1.5. Blacklisting of indicted supervisors improve the standard of SSCE.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	1	.4	.4	.4
Disagree	3	1.3	1.3	1.8
Undecided	5	2.2	2.2	3.9
Agree	131	57.5	57.5	61.4
Strongly Agree	88	38.6	38.6	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2025

Table 1.5 presents the responses of senior secondary staff regarding whether the blacklisting of indicted supervisors improves the standard of SSCE. Out of 228 respondents, a majority of 57.5% agreed and 38.6% strongly agreed with the statement, resulting in a combined total of 96.1% in favor. Only 0.4% strongly disagreed, 1.3% disagreed, and 2.2% were undecided. These findings suggest that the majority of senior secondary staff believe that the blacklisting of supervisors who are found guilty of misconduct is an effective measure to enhance the standards of SSCE. This policy is perceived as crucial for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the examination process, ensuring that supervisors uphold high ethical standards and contribute positively to the administration of exams.

**Table 1.6. Blacklisting of indicted examiners improve the standard of SSCE.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	5	2.2	2.2	2.2
Undecided	8	3.5	3.5	5.7



Agree	141	61.8	61.8	67.5
Strongly Agree	74	32.5	32.5	100.0
Total	228	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS OUTPUT, 2025

Table 1.6 presents the responses of senior secondary staff regarding whether the blacklisting of indicted examiners improves the standard of SSCE. Out of 228 respondents, a majority of 61.8% agreed and 32.5% strongly agreed with the statement, resulting in a combined total of 94.3% in favor. Only 2.2% disagreed, and 3.5% were undecided. These findings suggest that the majority of senior secondary staff believe that blacklisting examiners who are found guilty of misconduct is an effective measure to enhance the standards of SSCE. This policy is perceived as essential for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the examination process, ensuring that examiners uphold high ethical standards and contribute positively to the fair evaluation of student performance.

## 1.6 Conclusion and Recommendation

Maintaining standards in educational institutions is crucial, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, for several reasons. Firstly, it ensures the quality and credibility of the educational system, which is essential for producing competent graduates who can contribute effectively to the nation's development. Enforcement of penalties for examination malpractice promotes a culture of honesty and integrity among students, educators, and administrators, which is essential for the overall development of the education sector. Effective enforcement also helps in identifying and addressing systemic issues that may contribute to malpractice, leading to long-term improvements in examination administration.

The study recommends that in terms of enforcement of malpractice penalties, WAEC should continue to enforce strict penalties for examination malpractice to maintain high examination standards. Use of technology such as surveillance cameras and biometric verification to prevent malpractice and ensure that the examination process is conducted fairly and securely.



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