



# **Clamping Down the Activities of SSCE Miracle Centres for Quality Secondary Education in Anambra State, Nigeria**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author OFO designed the study. Authors OFO and OOA performed the statistical analysis. Author OFO wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors OFO and OOA managed the analyses of the study. Author OFO managed the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study was a descriptive survey that investigated clamping down the activities of Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) miracle centres for quality secondary education in Anambra state, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised 2,850 students from 18 public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, while 570 students representing 350 females and 220 males (20%) were drawn as the sample using simple random technique. The instrument for data collection was a 21 item questionnaire, validated by three experts, two from Educational Management and Policy department and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Educational Foundations department, all in Faculty of Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Cronbach Alpha reliability test was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument which yielded co-efficient value of 0.85. Data obtained were analyzed through mean and t-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicate that various types of SSCE miracle centres activities should be clamped down like shutting down of all miracle centres and

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enforcement of examination malpractice Act 33 of 1999 as sanction to defaulters. Gender and location do not differ significantly in SSCE miracle centre types of activities and methods of clamping down. Based on the findings, the study recommended inter alia that, miracle centres should be clamped down, and enforcement of Policy Act 33 of 1999 upheld to sanction defaulters.

**Keywords:** Senior secondary; examination; miracle center; quality education; clamp down.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Secondary education in Nigeria is received after primary education and before the tertiary stage. Thus, senior secondary education is positioned as a platform whereby graduates from this level of education advances to tertiary institutions. In addition, it is expected that secondary education should provide an increasing number of primary level school pupils with the opportunity for a higher quality irrespective of sex, or social, religious, and ethnic background; diversify its curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and roles possessed or open to in our modern age of science and technology [1]. In order to realize the objectives of secondary education, there is need for true test of knowledge “examination”. The essence of examination is to find out the extent to which students understand the learning experiences impacted by the teacher and grading in order of merit or competence. In this respect, no student is to get preferential treatment or undue advantage over others in the name of “miracle or special centre”.

From observation, many students in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra State secondary school during their West African Examination Council examination, (WAEC) and other external examinations suffer from pre-examination stress, strain, phobia and panic. These factors lure some students to enroll in miracle centres for examination malpractices.

‘Miracle centres’ otherwise known as ‘special centre’ in Nigeria are successfully perpetrated with active connivance of students, parents, school authorities, government functionaries, invigilators, and sometimes officials of examination bodies like Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) and National Teachers’ Institutes (NTI). Consequently, Wilayat [2] defined special centres as any examination venue with illegal act committed by students single-handedly or in

collaboration with others like fellow students, parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, printers or anybody or group before, during and after examination in order to obtain underserved marks or grades. Akin to these definitions, the researchers operationally defined miracle center as an illegal means of propagating the rise of examination malpractice in external examinations like WAEC.

The West African Examination Council [3] referred to examination malpractice as any irregular behavior exhibited by candidates or officials charged with the responsibility of conducting examination, in or outside the examination hall, before, during or after such examination. Similarly, the Examination Malpractice Act [4] states that examination malpractice is an act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulations to the extent of undermining the validity, reliability, authenticity of the examination and ultimately the integrity of the certificate issued. These activities culminate to what obtains in various miracle centres. Such centres bore the name “miracle centres” because even if you are a dyslexic student, differently able, less intelligent, once you enroll, you are assured of As, Bs and Cs in your result, depicting that a ‘miracle’ will happen. Thus, Alonta [5] averred that many senior secondary school students, in their desperation to secure the maximum five credits in ‘Ordinary Level’ certificate examination, have taken to the easy option of cheating. ‘Miracle centre where students easily pass SSCE grades through cheating is now a thriving business across Nigeria. The daunting business had been engrossed with myriad activities which dastardly mar Nigeria’s quality of education.

Types of activities at miracle centres include copying on sheets of papers, handkerchief, desk/chairs, non-appearance of candidate, sending of answers on mobile phone, teachers solving the questions, swapping of answer booklets, and collusion with other candidates or

external agents. Others include leakage of examination questions before the actual examination day and venue of the examination being placed in remote areas. In some centres, especially those privately-owned, the authorities sometimes bribe invigilators, supervisors and police personnel drafted to the centres who could turn a blind eye when malpractices are being perpetrated. Electronic gadgets like calculators, organizer, radio walkman and mobile phones are also used to carry out examination malpractices. Annually, examination bodies give stern warnings to the candidates to desist from bringing mobile phones into the examination halls but each year, the use of mobile phones to commit examination malpractice is recorded [6].

Other forms of examination malpractice at SSCE miracle centres are bringing books or chips into the hall, insulting or assaulting supervisor or invigilator, replacement of answer scripts in an examination hall, impersonation, smuggling scripts written outside into the examination centres, hooligans gaining entry into the examination centre by force when examination is in progress to remove question paper, leakage, relaxation of vigilance by invigilators, talking, dictation of answers to students and others. In order to mitigate the dastardly effect of these activities, the study averred clamping down all miracle centres activities.

Clamping down in the context of this study depicts imposing restrictions to unwholesome activities found in miracle centres for SSCE examinations across the country. Although various measures had been initiated through policy statements and purported actions, the hydra headed problem appears intractable. Although the federal government has put diverse measures to curb the menace of miracle centres activities, yet, year after year the credibility of Nigerian secondary education is endangered through the hydra-headed problem.

In recent times, syndicates have emerged across the country with innovative techniques for perpetrating miracle centres fraud. They mobilize all the resources their client need in their illegitimate bid to get results. The resources include financial inducement for invigilators and security agents who are not willing to cooperate. Most times, the syndicates employ people referred to as “mercenaries” to impersonate a candidate who does not want to personally sit for the examination. Also, a teacher could be asked to answer the questions on the chalkboard for

the candidates inside the examination hall to copy. These syndicates have made it very easy for students to acquire school certificates without necessarily entering the examination hall. This is the reason many students refuse to take SSCE in the schools they attend, especially if it was a public school. Instead, they become miracle centres candidates where they pay exorbitant fees in order to perpetrate examination malpractice. The fees charged to students are referred to as “cooperation fee” in many centres. The usual explanation students give for changing their schools in their final classes is that students do not pass examinations there. This is why they have to enroll as candidate of special centre where their success is guaranteed [7].

“Guaranteed success” in Nigerian miracle centres has attained alarming rate that the syndicate's device more sophisticated methods in perpetrating examination malpractices. The outcome of their activities has various negative implications.

Writing in the same vein, Aina and Aliyu [8] noted that the implication of dishonest approaches to the acquisition of academic certificate is overwhelming and obvious. First, large scale examination malpractice the type of which we are witnessing today, make nonsense of educational qualification and discredit institution of learning and the nation as a whole. This is bound to have adverse effects on the credibility of certification issued by our institutions of learning and examining bodies. The end-result is that the entire nations suffer when its destiny is placed in the hand of half-baked elements with low abilities, men and women who have no consciences.

Commenting on the danger posed to the nation at large by the ugly incidence of examination malpractice, Ekpu [9] remarked that: students buy question papers with their bodies if they are females, dull, wayward and beautiful; some others buy question papers with money if they are rich, dull, lazy and ambitious, and those who sell them are either teachers or supervisors which are men and women who are greedy and unscrupulous. Apart from the disadvantages of miracle centre activities, the researchers are more worried about their negative impact on the Nigerian education system. Miracle centres discourage candidates from studying hard, deny innocent students the opportunity for admission, delay the processing of examination results, satisfy candidates, decrease job efficiency and

stunt the nation's national growth; it must not be allowed to flourish in Anambra State, Nigeria and Awka South L.G.A. Hence, clamping down the activities of miracle centres in the area of study should be a collective responsibility of all. There is need to intensify efforts geared towards enforcing clamping down the menace of miracle centres activities.

Ojerinde [10] noted that despite the effort of West African Examination Council (WAEC) to curb special centres, candidates, examiners and agents are still perpetrating the act. Ojerinde explained that the board would continue to de-recognize examination towns and centres where massive cheating occurs. This measure became necessary because of the Board's zero tolerance for examination malpractice. The Examination Malpractice Act 33 [11] empowers examination bodies to withdraw or cancel results of candidates with cases of examination irregularities. Withdrawal or cancellation of miracle centre results is a stepping stone to or palliative mapped out by government to address this teething problem. However, in order that the problem be ripped from the bud, clamping down the activities in miracle centres will go a long way to ameliorate the teething challenge. For when the centres are no more in existence, the issue of cancellation or withdrawal of results will not crop up.

Researchers are not oblivious of the fact that in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra State, lots of measures have been initiated by the government, school authorities and others to ameliorate the menace of miracle centres activities but its sophistication abound.

The sophistication of miracle centres activities may be as a result of the decadence of moral values in many societies which cut across male and female segments of our environment. Thus, it appears that various types of miracle centres activities are performed, gender of the syndicates notwithstanding.

Asides the foregoing, location of the miracle centres do not significantly determine the nefarious activities of culprits in various miracle centres. Alas, the worrisome situation spurred the research suggestion that anybody found culpable will face the full wrath of the law irrespective of location or gender of the perpetrator.

Consequently, enforcement of drastic measures to forestall the activities of miracle centres may yield positively. Hence, the need for the

investigation on clamping down of SSCE miracle centres activities for quality education in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra State, Nigeria motivated the research.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Miracle centre for SSCE remains a social malaise devastating the goals of quality education in Nigeria and needs prompt clamping down as remedy. Bearing in mind that in Nigerian formal education system, examination is the evaluation of an academic exercise in an institution; as such its sanctity, transparency and conduct largely determines the credibility of both the certificate and quality of the institution. It is perplexing however, that SSCE positioned as a means of evaluating students' performance has gradually changed from a fair competition and a true reflection of a student's ability to an era of sporadic examination malpractice hidden under the sweet name 'miracle' or 'special' centre exercise.

Worrisome too, are the diverse methods perpetrators of the heinous exercise carry out the dubious activities without qualms. For instance, unscrupulous parents may negotiate up front with teachers, invigilators, owners of cyber café for answers for their wards questions in the external examinations prior to the inception of each of the subjects. Also, mercenaries will be somewhere writing the examination for the enrolled candidates. At times, the invigilators are used to provide the answers for each paper. In all these, the examinee will not be disturbed in the course of the malpractice, and will leave the examination venue with certainty of clearing all the subjects enrolled for with excellent grades. However, the determinant factor rests on the level of negotiation and payment made. It is sad to note that the outcome of this exercise leads to agonizing situation pulling the strings of Nigeria's educational goal and developmental strides which quality education is positioned to attain.

Suffice it to say that there are evidences of failures and drop out of these students at tertiary level, untimely death, mishap and devastation bedeviling the career of some students due to the scourge of miracle centres across the education system in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra State, Nigeria.

It has been observed that the more principals, government and examination bodies for SSCE try to find solutions to the problem, the more the perpetrators also device ways to frustrate the

efforts. The problem is scientifically metamorphosing from the era of candidates copying from their fellow candidates to using sophisticated electronic gadgets like cell phones and concealed earpieces. The adverse effects of SSCE miracle centres activities discredit educational qualification, institutions credibility and even examination bodies' standards. In effect, if genuine efforts are not made to clamp down the activities of miracle centres in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra State, Nigeria, the society may reap from the sour fruits, because when her destiny is placed at the hands of half baked graduates sponsored by a society with immoral values, the outcome is obvious. In addition, gender and location do not significantly determine the types and methods of SSCE miracle centres activities in the area of study. Against this backdrop, the researchers were spurred to investigate clamping down the activities of SSCE miracle centres activities for quality education in Anambra State, Nigeria.

### 1.2 Research Questions

1. What types of miracle centres activities should be clamped down in Awka South L.G.A?
2. What are the clamping down methods to ameliorate the menace of SSCE miracle centres activities for quality education?

### 1.3 Hypotheses

**Ho 1:** There is no significant difference between male and female responses on the types of clamping down SSCE miracle centres activities in Awka South L.G.A, Anambra State.

**Ho 2:** Mean scores of students on methods of enforcing clamping down SSCE miracle centres activities did not differ significantly.

## 2. METHODS

The study investigated clamping down SSCE miracle centres activities for quality education in Anambra State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 2,850 students from 18 government owned secondary schools in Awka South L.G.A, while 570 students representing 350 females and 220 males (20%) were drawn as the sample size using simple random technique. The instrument for data collection was a 21 item questionnaire, validated by three experts, two from Educational Management and Policy department and one from Measurement

and Evaluation Unit of Education Foundations department, all in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Reliability was determined using Cronbach Alpha which yielded co-efficient value of 0.85. Data obtained were analyzed using mean and hypotheses tested with t-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance. A bench mark value of 2.50 was used as agreement of each item while below 2.50 mean score is regarded as disagreement. The t-test difference was employed in testing the null hypotheses.

## 3. RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** What are the miracle centres activities that should be clamped down in Awka South L.G.A?

From Table 1 analyzed, it was observed that all the items indicate that respondents are in agreement with the examination malpractice activities exhibited in SSCE miracle centres. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 rated 2.9, 3.2, 3.1, 2.7, 2.6, 2.6, 3.0, 3.1 and 2.6 respectively were above the mean bench mark of 2.50.

**Research Question 2:** What are the clamping down methods for the menace of SSCE miracle centres activities for quality education?

From Table 2, it was observed that respondents are in agreement with almost all the items in the table on clamping down SSCE miracle centres activities for quality secondary education. The items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20 and 21 were rated 2.7, 3.1, 3.3, 2.6, 3.4, 3.0, 2.8, 3.2, 3.0 and 3.1 which is above the 2.50 mean score bench mark. However, items 15 and 17 were rated below 2.50 bench mark which indicates respondents' disagreement on mounting anti-malpractice bill board (1.9) and deployment of senior officials on inspection of examination centres (2.2).

**Ho 1:** There is no significant difference between male and female responses on the types of clamping down activities in SSCE miracle centres in Awka South L.G.A, Anambra State.

From the results presented in Table 3, the calculated t-value at 568 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance is 0.1464. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is accepted. This is an indication that male and female students do not differ significantly in the perception of types of clamping down to be enforced in SSCE miracle centres in Awka South L.G.A, Anambra State.

**Table 1. Mean ratings of the responses of types of miracle centres activities that should be clamped down**

S/No	Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1.	Bringing of foreign materials into the examination hall.	2.9	Agree
2.	Impersonation from control rooms.	3.2	Agree
3.	Electronic assisted malpractice.	3.1	Agree
4.	Collusion with invigilators/ other agents.	2.7	Agree
5.	Mass cheating for students by teachers	2.6	Agree
6.	Leakage of examination questions	2.6	Agree
7.	Personality connection by parents of the candidate.	3.0	Agree
8.	Upgrading of scores based on fraudulent payment by parents.	3.1	Agree
9.	Students' collaboration in exam hall.	2.6	Agree

**Table 2. Mean ratings of the responses on methods for clamping down the menace of SSCE miracle centres activities**

S/NO	Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
10.	Sensitization of the general populace about miracle centres.	2.7	Agree
11.	Appropriate sanctions to candidates.	3.1	Agree
12.	Appropriate sanctions to perpetrators.	3.3	Agree
13.	Cancellation of all results from miracle centres.	2.6	Agree
14.	Enforcement of examination malpractice Act 33 of 1999.	3.4	Agree
15.	Mounting of anti malpractice bill boards.	1.9	Disagree
16.	Monitoring the enrolment of candidates for miracle centre examination.	3.0	Agree
17.	Deployment of senior officials on inspection.	2.2	Disagree
18.	Sensitization on the proper code of conduct for the examination.	2.8	Agree
19.	Shutting down of all miracle centres.	3.2	Agree
20.	Appropriate punishment/imprisonment or commensurate fine to all defaulters.	3.0	Agree
21.	Confidentiality of the exam questions to guard against any form of leakage.	3.1	Agree

**Table 3. t-test difference in the mean ratings of male and female responses on types of clamping down activities in miracle centres**

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	Sig level	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Female	350	2.93	0.2796	568	0.05	0.1464	1.96	Not significant
Male	220	2.80	0.2265					

 $P > 0.05$ , DF 568**Table 4. t-test difference in mean ratings of students on methods of clamping down of SSCE miracle centres activities in urban and rural areas**

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	Sig level	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Urban	350	2.90	0.3248	568	0.05	0.3008	1.96	Not significant
Rural	220	2.87	0.4660					

 $P > 0.05$ , DF 568

**Ho 2:** Mean scores of students' responses on methods of clamping down of SSCE miracle centres activities in urban and rural areas did not differ significantly.

Table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value at 568 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance is 0.3008. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical table of 1.96, the null hypothesis is accepted. This shows that methods of clamping down of SSCE miracle centres activities in urban and rural locations in Awka South L.G.A do not differ significantly.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Findings on Table 1 show that virtually all the types of miracle centres activities in Awka South L.G.A should be clamped down because over the years, studies have shown that government adopted different measures to curb the dastardly effect of miracle centres activities without success. For instance, in 2012, unfortunately the bold step taken by Nigerian Senate to ban miracle centres across the nation was not enforced. Commenting on this, Asomba [12] remarked that, "efforts by stakeholders in the education sector to arrest this trend have proven futile, even investigations have revealed that some school owners, including officials of the various examination bodies, aid and abet examination malpractice.

Aiding and abetting of examination malpractice in miracle centres dastardly affect the quality of secondary education in Nigeria. This must have spurred the then Minister of State for Education, Barrister Ezenwo Wike who stated that two-year ban earlier suggested did not carry enough weight. He recommended for a 10 year ban on illegal examination centres. Wike opined that miracle centres have become a common place in the country because of the absence of adequate enforcement to mitigate the incident of examination malpractice. Rhetorically, one may ask, what has the government done because till date the menace of miracle centres activities still ravage the goals of credible education even in Awka South L.G.A, Anambra State. As a result, this study suggests clamping down the SSCE miracle centres activities.

The findings of this study indicate that many types of examination malpractice activities exist in the study area, perpetrated by students, teachers, parents and others. Vanguard [13] affirmed the situation by reporting that "evidences abound of increasing involvement in

examination malpractices by students, teachers and parents.

The result shown in Table 2 revealed that clamping down various methods of SSCE miracle centres activities will solve the intractable problems lowering the quality of the nation's education. For instance, item 14 on enforcement of examination malpractice Act 33 of 1999 and others will reposition our education system to a credible standard and erase the menace of miracle centres activities in our midst. This is in accord with the views of Olatunbosun [14] who presented excerpt of Examination Malpractice Act No. 33 of 1999 which stipulates a minimum punishment of fifty thousand naira (N50, 000.00) and a maximum of five years imprisonment, without option of fine, for violators of the offences stipulated in the Act. The offences are: cheating at examinations, stealing of question papers, impersonations, disturbances at examination, obstruction of supervision, forgery of result, breach of duty conspiracy and aiding, etc. In addition, the researchers suggested clamping down measures like shutting down all miracle centres, since several efforts made by the government did not yield much fruit. Therefore, clamping down of the SSCE miracle centres activities can only be realized through enforcement of the appropriate sanctions, policies and erasing the existence of miracle centres. Previously, amongst the efforts made by Nigerian government was to cancel and withdraw certificate of culprits. However, enforcing clamping down of SSCE miracle centres activities in line with the study will solve the hydra headed problem devastating the fabrics of quality education in the country. Note, cancellation and withdrawal of certificate after violators' graduation may have given the culprits undue advantage of being employed somewhere. However, when the Policy Analysis Act 33 of 1999 was enforced, for instance, cheating at examination attracts punishment for a candidate under 18 years, a fine of N100, 000.00 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years to both fine or imprisonment. Perpetrators and mercenaries of this heinous act will eschew evil.

Table 3 revealed that the types of SSCE miracle centres activities in Awka South L.G.A are not gender based, as male and female respondents concurred that various types exist across miracle centres in the study area. Furthermore, Table 4 showed that the methods of SSCE miracle centres activities in both urban and rural locations do not differ.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Various types of SSCE miracle centres activities abound and still exist in the study area demeaning government's efforts towards realizing quality education in Nigeria. However, the study posited that clamping down the deleterious SSCE miracle centres activities through the enforcement of government policy Act 33 of 1999, shutting down all miracle centres across the nation shall restore credible and quality education in Awka South L.G.A, Anambra State and the entire nation. Gender and location have no significant effect on the types and methods of SSCE miracle centres activities in the study area.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Appropriate sanction should be enforced to clamp down activities of perpetrators in SSCE miracle centres.
2. Concerted efforts should be made by the government to enlighten the populace on the weight of violation of any section of Examination Malpractice Act 33 of 1999.
3. Government should shut down all miracle centres irrespective of location or gender affiliation.
4. All SSCE miracle centres activities should be clamped down to restore quality education.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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