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MIRACLE CENTERS: A MAJOR CAUSE OF STUDENTS' UNSERIOUSNESS IN MATHEMATICS IN IKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, AKWA IBOM STATE.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined miracle centers as the major cause of students' unseriousness in learning mathematics in Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design. Five research questions guided the study. The population of the study was about 4,800 respondents comprising all students from all the four public secondary schools and all mathematics teachers. A sample of 180 students was selected from the population using simple random sampling technique to select 21 students each from the SS2 and SS3 classes and three teachers from each school. Instrument used for data collection was a 28-item researcher designed instrument tagged miracle center questionnaire in mathematics (MCQM). The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a reliability index of 0.77. The collected data was analyzed using statistical mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and test for homogeneity of the respondents' responses respectively. The result of the analysis revealed among others that schools are among the contributors of students' unseriousness in learning mathematics in Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, recommendations were made, one of which was that the school management should ensure that qualified mathematics teachers are employed to teach mathematics in our schools.

Keywords: miracle centers, students' unseriousness, mathematics.

Introduction

Education is a major tool for integration into society and for the realization of personal development, national consciousness and promotion of unity. To achieve these objectives, science education is a needed tool. Mathematics, one of the science subjects is defined as the abstract science of numbers, quantity and space, either as abstract concepts (pure mathematics), or applied to other disciplines such as physics and engineering (applied mathematics) (Nwankwo & Nwankwo, 2020). Mathematics education is seen as the bedrock and an indispensable tool for scientific and economic advancement of a person and a nation at large. It is a fundamental part of human thought and logic in his attempt to understand the worldview of the environment in which he lives (Lynn & Bracado, 2009). Therefore, mathematics plays a crucial role in human life. This was affirmed by Skemp (2008) who stated that mathematics provides an effective way of building mental discipline and encourage logical reasoning. Mathematics prepares one for the future world. Consequently, many nations take mathematics as a compulsory subject at ordinary level (O'level) since it is fundamental subject for human life. It is a

national policy in Nigeria that admission into most public tertiary institutions is based on a good pass in mathematics at O'level, which means that mathematics is critical in the development and academic progression of many.

Learning mathematics should be a major concern for everyone. Learning is seen as a function that maps experience onto behavior (Hower, 2013). It is an enduring change in the mechanism of behaviour.

Hanfi (2018) developed what was called 'mathophobia' which is fear of mathematics which leads to negative attitudes towards the subject (Donjan, 2010). Despite the importance of the subject, students are still afraid of failing the subject in any external examination and this fear leads them to be seeking for so-called brain support which is the act of cheating in examination (Sonnie, 2004). The students tend to commit malpractice either individually or by using the subject expertise otherwise known as machineries to get their expected grade and most of these machineries are the owners or the agents of working in particular center called miracle center.

Miracle center according to information, Nigeria are special examination centers building their foundation on examination malpractices. It is a place whereby different expertise (machineries) are grouped together to provide answers and solutions for students in any examination. Miracle (special) centers are almost becoming a norm in Nigeria. These centers contend against the system of education by lowering the standard at all levels, even to the extent that the centers have turned to be a business across the country. The so-called miracle centers are mostly associated with private secondary schools and have created opportunities for candidates who sit for their senior secondary school certificate examinations (SSCE) TO undeservedly and corruptly achieve excellent results. This has contributed immeasurably to the decay of Nigeria's education sector. The education sector is listed among the top five most corrupt sectors in Nigeria (Sahara reporters, 2019). This is largely due to examination fraud and malpractice. In 2012, Nigeria was ranked top in the global examination malpractice index (information Nigeria, 2012). This is a deplorable situation that needs urgent attention.

Statement of the Problem

Students' un-seriousness in sciences in general and mathematics in particular has been a major cause of worry for stakeholders in education. The situation has been blamed on many factors such as inexperienced teacher-preparation program, poor teaching methods, poor background of students in mathematics and many more. Examination malpractices have been one of the reasons which has been suggested to contribute to this ugly situation as it has cut across every sector of the educational system ranging from the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in a large proportion without efforts being made to control it. Bello (2003) laments that examination malpractices have taken the center stage of public examinations with students, teachers, parents and law enforcement agencies' involvement. Lack of proper screening of people who establish tutorial centers with regard to their qualifications, objectives and personal integrity may have been said to be responsible for the indiscriminate escalation of examination malpractice centers. As a

result of the situation, students have become so non-challant concerning their studies of mathematics and this has resulted in their poor performance in the subject in both external and internal examinations. It is against this background that the present study has decided to investigate the role played by such so-called miracle centers in contributing to students' un-seriousness in learning mathematics

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to achieve the purpose of the study

1. What is the attitude of students towards learning of mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?
2. How is miracle center a propelling factor to students' laziness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?
3. How do schools contribute to mass exodus of students to miracle centers in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?
4. How do miracle center encouragers motivate students' un-seriousness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?
5. How does the continual existence of miracle centers contribute to students' un-seriousness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on theory of functionalism propounded in 1964 by Emile Duekhiem. According to this theory, society should be perceived as an integrated whole with each of its part contributing to the overall stability of the social system. By this assertion, everything in society is considered functional to its existence and survival. Hence, society would be incomplete if any of the independent part is expunged. Miracle center is obviously part of the system as it creates the opportunity for some people to cheat and pass while allowing the law enforcement and other security agencies to discharge part of their constitutional duties. Therefore, people who engage in using tutorial centers for examination malpractices for economic gain are regarded as innovators. These set of individuals could capitalize on the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria as basis to committing examination related crimes for material gains. This theory therefore, applies to the present study as it ascertains the importance of society in child's learning and upbringing, thus miracle centers being part of social system tampers with the child's perception to learning which makes him see these centers as part of the norms of passing examinations.

Research Method

The study was carried out using survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), survey is generalized means of data collection through the use of questionnaire or interviews. The design is appropriate to the present study as miracle centers were investigated as the major cause of students' un-seriousness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria because the study sort the opinion of senior secondary students and mathematics teachers who responded properly to the researchers' design questions

on miracle centers as a major cause of students' un-seriousness. The study was carried out in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The state was used because it has four public secondary schools and 10 private secondary schools. Since private secondary schools have been considered the hub of miracle centers used often for examination malpractices. The population of the study consists of all the students and all mathematics teachers in the four government-owned secondary schools in the state totaling about 4,800 students and 20 mathematics teachers from all the government-owned secondary schools in the state. From this population, a sample of 180 respondents were selected as follows: four schools were selected using simple random sampling technique. From each selected school, only SS 2 and SS3 classes were used. Of the two classes in each school (SS 2 & SS 3), 21 students were randomly selected. In each school, three teachers were also randomly selected making a total of 45 respondents from each school and a grand total of 180 respondents.

Instrument for data collection was a 28-item questionnaire designed by the researcher in relation to the objective of the study. The questionnaire was tagged miracle center questionnaire in mathematics (MCQM). The questionnaire was a 4-point -type of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The weighting for the response options were 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts, one from science education department, the second from educational foundation department with a bias in measurement and evaluation, while the third was an experiences secondary school teacher who has been involved with supervision and marking of external examinations. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha with a reliability index of 0.77 obtained, a value adjudged according to Nworgu (2015) as making an instrument reliable. The instrument was administered by the researchers themselves and collected on the spot to avoid item mortality. Hence there was a 100% return rate. The collected data were analyzed using statistical mean to answer the research questions and standard deviation to establish the extent of homogeneity of the responses.

Presentation of Results

The results of the study are presented in Tables and in line with the research questions as shown

Research question 1: What is the attitude of students towards learning of mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria? Answer to this research question is presented in Table one.

Table one: Mean scores and standard deviation of attitude of students towards learning of mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD		REMARKS
1.	I dislike mathematics as a subject	2.32	0.66		reject
2.	I am scared about mathematics	2.43	0.72		reject
3.	I love solving mathematical equations	3.26	1.15		accept
4.	I participate actively in during mathematics lesson	3.46	1.23		accept
5.	I do answer questions in mathematics class	2.96	0.98		accept
6.	I do ask questions in mathematics class	2.80	0.90		accept
7.	I am always attentive while learning mathematics	3.16	1.13		accept
8.	I always like solving mathematics questions at my spare time		3.25	1.13	accept
	MEAN OF MEANS		**2.96**		

The data presented in Table 1 shows the responses from the respondents on the attitude of students towards learning of mathematics, as evident in items 1-8. Items 3-8 have mean scores above 2.50 which is the cut-off point and hence are accepted. Items 1 and 2 have mean scores of 2,32 and 2,43 which are each less than 2.50, the criterion cut-off point. The two items are therefore rejected.

Research question two: How are miracle centers a propelling factor to students' laziness in learning of mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria? Answer to this research question is presented in Table two.

Table two: mean scores and standard deviation of the respondents on how miracle center is a propelling factor to students' laziness in learning of mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

.S/N	**ITEMS**	**X**	**SD**	**REMAR**	
9.	Existence of miracle centers make me not serious in learning mathematics		3.11	1.06	accept
10.	Presence of miracle centers make me develop laziness in solving mathematics questions	3.18	1.09	accept	
11.	Students who use miracle centers never partake in any mathematics competitions	3.20	1.10	accept	
12.	Students are always discouraged studying mathematics knowing fully well they will go to miracle center and succeed		3.11	0.86	accept
	MEAN OF MEANS		**3.15**		

The data in Table 2 reveals that the respondents all that miracle centers are propelling factors to students' laziness in learning mathematics as evident in items 9-12 all with mean above 2.5., the cut-off point for the study.

Research Question Three: How do schools contribute to mass exodus of students to miracle centers in Ikah L. G. A. of Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria? Answer to research question 3 is presented in Table three.

Table three: Mean and standard deviation of the responses of the respondents on how schools contribute to mass exodus of mathematics students to miracle centers

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	REMAR
13.	Insufficient qualified mathematics teachers cause Many students to have negative attitude towards mathematics		3.45	1.16 accept
14.	the periods of the day allocated on the time table for mathematics most times is not appropriate for easier assimilation by the students	3.32	1.16	accept
15.	mathematics teachers are not friendly to students	2.90	0.95	accept
16.	poor teaching methods used by some mathematics teachers scare students from learning mathematics	3.13	1.07	accept
17.	mathematics teachers do not use learner-friendly method of teaching		2.94	0.97 accept
18.	mathematics teachers do tell students directly to participate in miracle centers		2.63	0.82 accept
19.	schools play no role in encouraging mathematics students involving in miracle centers		2.44	0.72 reject
	MEAN OF MEANS		**2.97**	

The data presented in Table 3 shows the responses from the respondents on how schools contribute to mass exodus of mathematics students to miracle centers. Items 13-18 all have mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50, indicating that respondents all are of the opinion that those items present the ways schools contribute to mathematics students' mass exodus to miracle centers. The respondents disagree with only item number 19, still confirming that schools contribute to mass exodus of mathematics students to miracle centers.

Research question four: How do miracle center encouragers motivate students' unseriousness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria? Answer to the research question is presented in Table 4

Table Four: Mean and standard deviation of the responses of the respondents on how miracle center encouragers motivate students' unseriousness in learning mathematics

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	REMARK
20.	Miracle center drivers make students' passion in studying mathematics poor	3.07	1.04	accept
21.	miracle center machineries make students to be experts in studying mathematics by solving their examination questions for them	2.40	0.70	reject
22.	miracle centers do not kill students' passion in studying mathematics	2.32	0.66	reject
23.	parents sending their children to miracle centers make their children to be unserious in learning mathematics	2.97	10.98	accept
24.	schools' refusal towards practices of miracle centers makes students to be serious in learning mathematics	3.20	1.10	accept
25.	not giving punishment to the culprits of miracle centers encourages students' mass exodus to those centers	3.01	1.01	accept
	MEAN OF MEANS		**2.83**	

Items 20-25 in Table 4 displays the responses from the respondents on how miracle center encouragers motivate students' unseriousness in learning mathematics. Respondents accepted all items with the exception of item number 22 as ways schools encourage students' mass exodus to miracle centers. This is because all these items, except item 22 have mean scores greater than 2.50, the criterion mean.

Research Question Five: How does the continual existence of miracle centers contribute to result in students' unseriousness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria? Answer to this research question is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: mean and standard deviation of the respondents on how the continual existence of miracle centers result to students' unseriousness in learning mathematics.

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	REMARK
26.	Continual existence of miracle centers motivates students' unseriousness towards mathematics	3.11	1.06	accept
27.	Students' passion for studying mathematics will become very poor if miracle centers continue to exist and operate	3.10	1.05	accept
28.	Students' constant participation in miracle centers Makes them more serious in learning mathematics	2.30	0.65	reject
	MEAN OF MEANS		**2.84**	

The data presented in table 5 shows that respondents accepted items 26 and 27, rejecting item 28 as ways continual existence of miracle centers result to students' unseriousness in learning mathematics. The decision was based the value of the mean with respect to the cut-off point.

Summary of Findings

The under listed are the findings from this study

1. Students show positive attitude towards the learning of mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
2. Miracle centers have been found to be a propelling factor towards students' laziness in learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
3. Schools have been found to be a contributing factor to students' mass exodus to miracle centers
4. Encouragers of miracle centers have been found to be motivators of students' unseriousness in learning mathematics
5. Continual existence of miracle centers results to students' unseriousness towards learning mathematics in Ikah Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

The analysis of research question one shows that students manifest positive attitude towards the learning of mathematics in Ikah local government area, Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. The finding agreed with that of Armstrong (2009) who noted that the fear of

mathematics can be caused by teachers, methodology and other factors such as involvement in miracle centers capable of reducing students' interest and passion towards learning of mathematics. Odo (2015) supporting the result opined that there are hardworking students who participate actively during lessons and also love solving mathematics, though they may be discouraged by the activities of cheats. The result however disagrees with Asante (2012) who reported that poor performance of students in examinations was as a result of their poor attitude and lack of interest in the subject.

From Table 2, miracle centers have been found to be propelling factor to students' laziness in learning mathematics. Supporting the finding Jokthan (2013) listed some factors that contribute to students' laziness in learning to include teacher factors, school factors as well as involvement in miracle examination centers for unmerited examination results. The findings also showed that schools are contributory factors to students' mass exodus to miracle center. The presence of quarks in the teaching profession and the use of poor teaching method do not motivate students to learn mathematics. Furthermore, professional miracle center encouragers are the major contributors to students' unseriousness in learning mathematics by killing their passion for studying the subject.it was for this reason that Jokthan (2013) went further and reported that teachers, parents and other significant people do encourage students' unseriousness toward learning through their direct and indirect motivation in order to get promoted. Sometimes these group of people are driven by pressure to see their students succeed by all means, fair or foul. It was further observed that as long as these so called miracle centers are allowed to continue to exist, students can never be serious with their studies. No wonder Odo (2015) lamented that the continual existence of miracle centers will constantly contribute to students' laziness and decline in education system in Nigeria if not urgently and properly checked.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that schools are the contributors to students' participation in miracle centers, thereby, encouraging students' unseriousness in learning mathematics which reduces student' passion towards studying mathematics. Continual existence of miracle centers also is the major cause of students' unseriousness in learning mathematics in Ikah L. G. A. of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Hence, as long as these miracle centers continue to exist, standard of education will continue to fall.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. School management should ensure that qualified mathematics teachers registered with teacher registration council of Nigeria are employed to teach mathematics in our schools in Nigeria.
2. The government should implement procedure for eradicating operation of miracle centers in our society because it is a canker worm that devoured quality education in Nigeria.
3. In-service training for mathematics teachers should be organized in order to ease the problem of shortage of mathematics teachers in our

secondary schools and there should be incentive to the practicing mathematics teachers to encourage them.

4. School authorities should organize remedial classes for students who are weak in mathematics and should from time to time organize seminars on how to teach mathematics.

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