

## Special Examination Centres: Use, Motivations, and Perceived Effects on Later Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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### Abstract

This study investigated the use, motivations and perceived effects of special examination centre on later academic performance among undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The study was guided by four research objectives, and a cross-sectional research design was adopted. A simple random sampling method by balloting and availability sampling techniques were used to select 204 respondents. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Findings revealed that the majority (87%) of the students have utilized special examination centers, and this is evidence that the practice was widespread within the educational sector. It was also found that the primary motivation for students' use of special examination centres was to pass with minimal effort (51.0%). Others include lack of preparation (26.5%) and fear of failing regular exams (19.0%). Moreover, the impact on the later academic performance of undergraduate students was largely negative, with 51.0% stating that reliance on these centres led to a decline in performance over time. Based on the findings, the study recommended the implementation of awareness campaigns on the long-term consequences of special examination centres and examination malpractice, encouraging a culture of academic integrity, stricter monitoring of examination centres, and the reinforcement of academic support programs to help students prepare adequately for examinations. Additionally, universities are encouraged to introduce stricter penalties for students involved in such practices and promote integrity-driven assessment methods, such as continuous assessments and practical-based evaluations, to reduce overreliance on final examinations.

**Keywords:** examination, special examination centre, academic performance, university students, undergraduates

## Introduction

The hallmark of Nigerian secondary school education is the Senior School Certificate Examination. Final year students in most secondary schools have the options of sitting for one or both examinations organized by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Certificate Examination (NECO). Students who attend technical schools often write the examination conducted by the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB). To be deemed successful in these examinations, the education policy requires the candidates to obtain a minimum of five credit passes, including English and Mathematics, in not more than two sittings (Amake, 2019). For students who intend to go into higher institutions, they are required to sit for a unified matriculation examination conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). With fewer admission spots in higher institutions, these examinations are highly competitive and often come with much pressure on the students. Many students sit for these examinations several times without success, making them seek shortcuts to succeed.

One of the measures often used by students and their parents to achieve quick success is by patronizing special examination centres (SECs), also known as miracle centres (Amake, 2019). These centres charge additional fees to assist students unduly during the external examinations (Onyedinefu, 2019), making them a quicker and easier option for students who have failed repeatedly to

meet the rigorous admission requirements. In some cases, parents enroll their children in these centres to avoid the expense of repeated examination registrations and public ridicule over their children's failures (Amake, 2019). These centres, which were supposed to prepare students to study hard and pass, are now used as an avenue for assisting students, typically by providing them with unauthorized access to examination materials, answer keys, or assistance from invigilators or staff (Alhasaan & Adamma, 2017). Other methods used by special centres include pre-exposing the question papers and drilling the students on the right answers, use of impersonation, substituting students' answer scripts with already prepared answer sheets, providing answers to students through their cell phones, and allowing students to share their answers among themselves (Amake, 2019). With the emergence of these "miracle centres", students no longer work hard to pass examinations; rather, they rely on this undue assistance to obtain unmerited grades, which are most often incongruent with their actual academic abilities (Uzor, 2014).

Various factors are associated with the establishment and the sustained patronage of these examination centres. Some of these factors are related to various stakeholders such as individual students, schools, faith-based groups, community-based groups, and parents (Agwu et al, 2022). Student-related factors include a decline in study habits, peer pressure, and desire to pursue disciplines or courses perceived to be prestigious (Akintunde &

Salzing-Musa, 2016). Parents indulge in or encourage the practice to secure a desired future career for their children, or to avoid repeated payments for the examinations (Anzene, 2014). Corrupt supervisors and custodians of examination papers also contribute to undermining the examination process (Adewale, 2013). Additionally, SECs are often located in remote areas, making it difficult for monitoring/supervising officials to access them (Zakka, 2014). This absence of regular monitoring encourages unauthorized activities within the centres (Onyedinefu, 2019). Researchers have further identified a decline in societal values as a driver of the use of SECs and examination malpractice in general (Adegoke, 2010). This has led to a decline in students' genuine commitment to hard work and adherence to examination guidelines (Aworinde, 2015).

Education is the most powerful instrument for achieving personal development and empowering citizens to contribute meaningfully to societal development (Dajwan et al, 2021). The proliferation and students' continuous patronage of special centres and examination malpractices have been linked to the declining standard of tertiary education in Nigeria (Okoye et al., 2024). Emelogu et al. (2021) note that the activities of special examination centres are very destructive to the nation's educational system. Their practices undermine the progress of education, as well as the competence of human capital in workplaces (Agwu et al, 2022), and have negative implications both to society and individual candidates/students. For society in general, when cheating at

examinations is widespread and goes unpunished, it reinforces the culture of dishonesty, moral relativism, and corruption (Iremide, 2023). This raises ethical concerns regarding fairness, integrity, and honesty in academic assessments and can have detrimental effects on the moral development and character of students, as well as society at large (Adewale, 2013).

Several studies have shown that the use of special examination centres has significant implications for the quality of graduates from higher institutions. Emelogu et al (2021) for instance note that the activities of special examination centres are very destructive on the nation's educational system. When students rely on such centres to pass their exams, they are not adequately prepared for the academic challenges of higher learning, resulting in graduates lacking the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies, and not contributing meaningfully to the workforce. This can lead to students struggling with university coursework, leading to poor academic performance, high dropout rates, and an overall decline in the quality of graduates. Ogundele (2020) asserts that patronizing these centres often results in students gaining admission without the foundational knowledge necessary to navigate higher education and achieve success. When students rely on such centres to pass their exams, they are not adequately prepared for the academic challenges of higher learning. This can lead to students struggling with university coursework,

leading to poor academic performance, high dropout rates, and an overall decline in the quality of graduates. Ogundele (2020) asserts that this inadequacy reflects poorly on higher institutions and diminishes the reputation of degrees conferred by these schools. According to Ogundele, the long-term impact is that employers may lose confidence in graduates from certain institutions, leading to increased unemployment and underemployment rates among young graduates.

In 1999, a major intervention on the Examination Malpractice Act was made by the federal government of Nigeria to promote examination integrity in the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). This intervention criminalizes examination malpractice and specifies jail terms and fines for offenders. Similarly, examination regulatory bodies, state ministries of education, and the National Examination Council (NECO) enforce sanctions on centres known for examination malpractice, as well as cancelling/withholding results of candidates suspected of having engaged in examination malpractice in those centres (Akintunde & Selzing-Musa, 2016).

Despite all these efforts by government and examination bodies to clamp down on examination malpractices, special centres continue to thrive and enjoy the patronage among students (Agwu et al, 2022). This might be due to limited empirical data on the actual

prevalence and how the use of special centres affects students' later academic performance. This study, therefore, intends to fill this gap in the literature by investigating the use, the motivations, and perceived effects of special examination centres on the later academic performance of the undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Objectives of the Study:** This study aimed to;

- 1.determine the proportion of undergraduate students who patronized special examination centres.
- 2.investigate the reasons why students utilize examination centres.
- 3.examine the perceived effects of the utilization of special examination centres on the later academic performance of undergraduate students.
- 4.identify perceived strategies to curb the use of special examination centres by students.

## Methodology

**Research Design:** The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. This design is appropriate for the study because it has the capacity to gather necessary information within a limited time frame, from a section of a study population, and allows the use of a selected sample to describe or represent a large population at a given point in time (Obikeze, 1990).

**Population for the study:** The population for the study was made up of 34,701 (14,242 male and 20,459 female)

undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, in the 2023/2024 academic session (University of Nigeria, Nsukka Admissions' Office, 2024).

**Sample/Sampling Techniques:** Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents. The first stage involved using Taro Yamena's (1967) method of sample size determination, with a 95% confidence level, and a level of maximum variability ( $<.07$ ). The formula for the sample size estimation is;  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$  where  $n$  = sample size,  $N$  = population size,  $e$  = level of precision (allowable error) that is 7% or  $(0.07)^2$ . A sample size of 204 was computed for the study.

At the second stage, simple random sampling method by balloting was used to select four faculties in the University of Nigeria Nsukka for the study. The four faculties selected were Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Biological Sciences and Physical Sciences. In the third stage, simple random sampling method by balloting was also used in selecting four departments from the four faculties already chosen for the study. One department was chosen from each of the faculties selected. The departments selected were Mass Communication, Philosophy, Microbiology and Computer Science. Simple random sampling by balloting was used to give each faculty and each department equal opportunities of being chosen for the study. In the fourth stage, the convenience (availability) sampling method was used in administering questionnaires to the 204 undergraduate students from the selected

departments. Each of the four departments was assigned 51 questionnaires, making it a total of 204 questionnaires. The availability method allowed quick access to willing respondents from the chosen departments and ensured efficient data collection within a limited time frame. At the end, only 200 respondents were finally selected after data collation, gleaning, cleansing and analysis.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** A structured questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection in this study. The structure of the questionnaire was designed to meet the specific research objectives in alignment with the research goal. The questionnaire consisted of sections A-E. Section A contained the socio-demographic information of the respondents. Section B was used to obtain data on the proportion of students who have ever utilized a special examination centre. The response was a dichotomous (yes or no) answer to the question asked. Section C was used to elicit data on the major reasons students use special examination centres. Section D focused on the perceived effects of the use of special examination centres on the later academic performance of students while section E sought information on the respondents' perceived strategies to be used to reduce the use of special examination centres. Responses on sections C – E were on a single select of one answer chosen from a list of options. The questionnaire was structured in a concise and in simple English language to enable easy understanding and response to the questions.



**Validity and Reliability of the Instruments:** The instrument was validated by three research experts, two from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria Nsukka, and one from the Department of Social Works, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Based on their corrections, necessary modifications were made to improve the content validity of the instrument. Furthermore, the instrument was pre-tested on a sample of 20 undergraduate students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology who were not involved in the study. The data collected from the pilot test was then subjected to reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method. The reliability correlation co-efficient was 0.78, indicating that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the main study.

**Method of Data Collection:** Two hundred and four (204) copies of questionnaires were distributed to the undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The distribution and collection of the copies of the questionnaires took four days with the help of three trained research assistants. At the end, only 200 copies of the questionnaires were retrieved, showing 98% return rate.

**Statistical and Data Analysis:** The data were analyzed quantitatively using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Responses were coded

with relevant numbers and entered as raw data in the SPSS software. The coded data were afterwards analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide insight on the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents on the various issues of the study. These were presented using a pie chart and frequency tables.

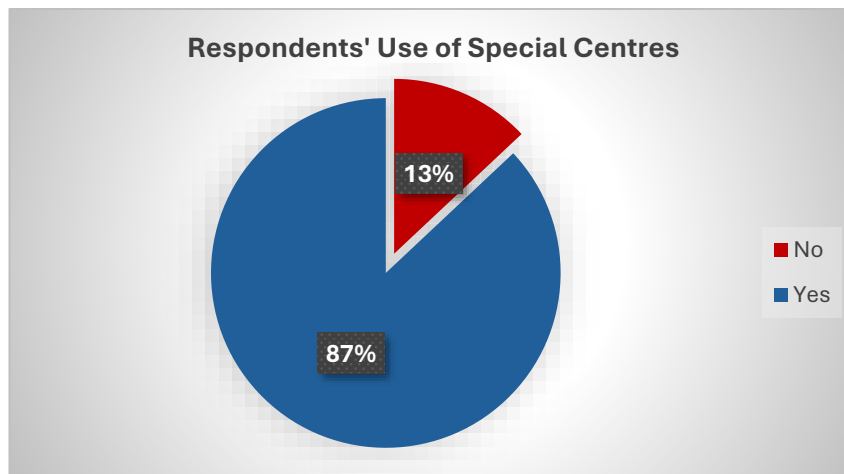
### Results

The socio-demographic data of the respondents showed that 46.5% of the respondents were male while 53.5% were female. Data on the age of the respondents indicated that 9% were within the age range of 15-20 years, 57.5% were within the age range of 21-25 years, 28.5% within the age range of 26-30 years while 5% were 31 years and above. Data on academic levels showed that 11.5% of the respondents were in 100 level; 11%, 200 level; 9.5% 300 level; 60.5% 400 level, while 7.5% were in 500 level. The marital status showed that majority (91.5%) of the respondents were single while 8.5% were married. Data on religious affiliation showed that 98% were Christians, 1.0% Moslem and 1.0 % was for others.

### Prevalence of the use of special education centres

Figure 1 presents the frequency of students who have utilized special examination centre. More than three-quarter (87%) of the respondents have utilized special examination centre, while 13% have not.

**Figure 1: Proportion of the respondents who utilized special examination centres**



Source: Field Survey, 2025

#### **Motivations for patronizing SECs**

Results from Table 2 show the main reasons why students use special examination centres. From the table, majority (51%) of the respondents use special examination centre to pass with minimal effort, followed by due to lack of preparation (26.5%), due to fear of failing regular exams (19%) and due to peer pressure (3.5%).

**Table 2: Motivations for students' use of special examination centres**

Options	<i>f</i>	%
Pressure from peers	7	3.5
Fear of failing regular exams	38	19.0
To pass with minimal effort	102	51.0
Lack of preparation	53	26.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

#### **Perceived effect of using SECs on later academic performance of students**

Results from Table 3 reveal the perceived effects of the use of special examination centre on the later academic performance

of the students who have already patronized the centre. Data from the table showed that more than half (59%) of the respondents indicated that it causes a decline in academic performance over time, (16%) of the respondents indicated that it reduces students' motivation to learn, while (13%) of the respondents indicated no noticeable effects, (12%) indicated poor performance due to weak foundational knowledge.

**Table 3: Perceived effects of use of special examination centres on the later academic performance of the students )**

Options	<i>f</i>	%
Poor performance in the course of study due to a lack of foundational knowledge	21	12.0
Reduced motivation to learn	28	16.0
No noticeable effect	23	13.0
Decline in academic performance over time	103	59.0
Total	175	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

### Perceived strategies to apply to reduce the use of special examination centres

In Table 4, the respondents indicated the most perceived strategies to reduce the utilization of special examination centres by students. Results indicate that about a third (35.0%) of the respondents consider stricter monitoring of exam processes as the most effective strategy to reduce the use of special examination centres, 31.5% support severe penalties for offenders, 21.5% favour awareness campaigns on its negative effects, and 12.0% advocate for providing academic support to struggling students.

**Table 4: Perceived strategies to reduce the use of special examination centres**

Options	<i>f</i>	%
Stricter monitoring of exam processes	70	35.0
Awareness campaigns on its negative effects	43	21.5
Severe penalties for offenders	63	31.5
Providing academic support and mentorship to struggling students	24	12.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

### Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the use, motivations, and perceived effects of special examination centre on the later academic performance among undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The findings on the frequency of respondents who have utilized special examination centres showed that majority of the respondents have utilized special examination centres in the past. This shows that a good number of students who are currently

studying in the universities sat for their senior school certificate and/or matriculation examinations in various centres where they were unduly assisted to pass the examinations. This is in line with the observations by Amake (2019) that the majority of students and parents, who want their children to pass their senior school examinations, patronize these special examination centres. Similarly, Alonta (2022) noted that due to desperation to pass examination with high grades, many senior secondary students have opted for cheating during examinations by patronizing the so called “miracle centres.” Furthermore, the widespread use of special examination centres suggests that the practice is common among students, reinforcing the outcome of investigation by Atueyi (2019) where it was found that many schools, be it public, private or WAEC approved study centres whose candidates are making very good results, are always done so through external help. Moreover, majority of the private school owners would go an extra mile to ensure that their students pass West African Senior School Certificate Examinations with unmerited distinctions.

The findings on the reasons why students utilize special examination centres demonstrate that larger proportion of the respondents indicated that the primary reason is to pass examination with minimal effort, followed by lack of preparation, and fear of failing regular exams. These imply that examination malpractice is a critical issue for discussion in education sector. These findings highlight a more global loss of value for hard work, impatience and



pressure to achieve immediate results prevalent in contemporary society among the youth. This result aligns with the study by Olushola (2006), which maintained that students who failed to study hard for examination often seek alternatives, and usually get involved in examination malpractice to succeed.

On the perceived effect of special examination centre on the later academic performance of the students, the study found that the impact of special examination centres on students' later academic performance is largely negative, with significant proportion of the respondents stating that it leads to a decline in performance over time, followed by reduction in motivation to learn. These imply the lack of enthusiasm to study and work hard, which contributes to the erosion of academic integrity in society. It leads to the production of "half baked" graduates from the institutions of higher learning. These findings agree with the study by Agwu et al. (2022) which noted that special examination centre tend to discourage genuine hard work by students and unintentionally cause problems for tertiary learning. These results also align with the study by Yusuf et al, (2025) who found that reliance on examination fraud diminishes students' study habits, discourages students from studying hard, reduces healthy competition amongst students, lower overall standard of education, reduces the value of certificate obtained, and leads to under-achievement in the labour market. Similarly, Emelogu et al. (2021) assert that special examination centres promote malpractice, and their activities result in

producing half-baked students who are incompetent in formal communication. More still, some of these students often graduate without adequate competencies that meet the labour market demands.

The study further highlights the perceived potential strategies for minimizing students' reliance on special examination centres. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents identified stricter monitoring of examination processes as one of the most effective measures followed by severe penalties for offenders. These imply the urgent need for a multi-faceted approach to combat the growing menace of special examination centres in Nigeria. It is imperative that the already existing examination bodies (WAEC, NECO, NABTEC and JAMB) should be proactive and sincere in monitoring examination activities across different centres. This also calls for the installation of surveillance technology in examination halls and centres to ensure real monitoring during examinations. Moreover, any culprit will be reprimanded accordingly. These findings support the recommendations by Emelogu et al (2021) who argued that the implementation of examination malpractice Act of 1999 which stipulates 21 years imprisonment is essential to deterring malpractice. It also complements the study by Pinga, Jor and Olatunde (2024), which emphasized the quick intervention of the examination bodies, the government and non-governmental bodies to combat students' dependence on fraudulent examination practices. Such interventions are raising awareness on the ills of examination malpractice, security measures for

examination materials, and imposing penalties on those caught engaging in malpractice.

### Conclusion

The widespread use of special examination centres among students, driven by desire for easy success, lack of preparation and fear of failure, poses great risk to the educational sector of the country. While these centres may offer temporary academic advantages, they contribute to long-term academic decline, as students who use them often struggle in subsequent university examinations due to poor motivation to learn, and weak foundational knowledge. The negative effects extend beyond academics. In as much as reliance on these centres reduces students' motivation to learn, it ultimately affects the quality of graduates produced by the educational system, raising concerns about their competence in professional fields. Additionally, the continued existence of special examination centre will further weaken the Nigerian education system, making it imperative for university authorities, policymakers, and stakeholders to take decisive action in restoring academic integrity. To curb this problem therefore, it was suggested that stricter monitoring of examination processes and severe penalties are very necessary in education sector. Addressing the major reasons why students engage in patronizing the special examination centres will also help in reducing the menace of special examination centres in Nigeria

### Recommendations

The paper recommends the following:

1. To prevent the widespread use of special examination centres by students, awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate students on the long-term negative effects of relying on such centres like poor academic performance, lack of motivation to learn and so on. Schools should also implement severe penalties for those caught engaging in malpractice to deter further participation.
2. Encouraging a culture of academic integrity through student-led initiatives and peer mentoring can also help reduce the demand for special examination centres. Ultimately, fostering a strong academic support system and reinforcing ethical values will discourage students from seeking shortcuts to success.
3. To address the challenges posed by special examination centres, stricter monitoring of examination processes should be enforced to prevent malpractice. The government should also search for and close down all those “miracle centres” in the country.
4. Universities should promote integrity-driven assessment methods, such as continuous assessments and practical-based evaluations, to reduce overreliance on final examinations.
5. There should also be implementation of the Examination Act of 1999, which stipulates 21 years imprisonment for culprits. All these will help to overcome the negative effects of special examination centres.

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