

Cultism among Nigerian Undergraduates: Perception of Students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the causes, consequences and strategies for curbing cultism among Nigerian Undergraduates. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A four point structured 20-item rating scale questionnaire was used for data collection. The validity of the instrument were ascertained and the reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was established. Three research questions and one hypothesis were formulated for this study. Item by item analysis and t-test were the statistical tools adopted. The study discovered that cultism among the students of tertiary institutions is prevalent and urgent solutions are needed to be taken by the government, institution and society at large to curb it. It is recommended that counselling should be intensified to create awareness on cultism, its consequences and how it can be curbed among undergraduates; also, seminars, and workshops should be organized for students, lecturers, parents and community at large. It is therefore concluded that cultism among Nigerian undergraduates is real and urgent solution is needed to be taken by the government, institutions and society at large to curb it.

Keywords: Cultism, undergraduates, clashes, Nigeria, loss of lives.

Introduction

The prevalence of cultism among Nigerian undergraduates is disheartening because of its debilitating effects. Students' participation in cults has had the effect of ensuring that the majority of those on campus live in a state of perpetual fear, because of the alarming rate of gang torture, rape, kidnapping and theft (Onoyase, Onoyase & Arubayi, 2008). While it is almost impossible to accurately document the amount of crime resulting from cult activities (Adewale, 2005), there is anecdotal evidence that cultists engage in a range of violent and destructive acts that have radically altered the learning environment. Cult activities among undergraduates include assaults on students, gang warfare, burglary extortion, destruction of college properties, killings, maiming etc (Taiwo, 2004). A number of commentators suggest that students' involvement in cultism on campus has also eroded educational values and goals (Nwagwu, 2006; Adewale, 2005; Onoyase, Onoyase & Arubayi, 2008). Male cultists engage in rape, violence, murder and kidnapping, and female cultists often operate prostitution rings, and also engage in violence. In addition to acts of violence, cultists openly cheat in examinations and openly threaten their lecturers (Onoyase et al., 2008).

No wonder, cultism is defined by Ugorji (2011) as a ritual practice by group of people whose membership, admission, policy, initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike. Ekwunife (2000) defined cultism as “a systematized form of organization with a religious overtone in which members are engaged in concerted hidden activities whose overall end and results spell doom for the members, the community and society at large”. Ogunbameru (2004) defines cultism or secret cult as any form of organization whose activities are not exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but such activities are carried out at odd hours of the day and they often clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life.

Furthermore, Adewale (2005) cites the anthropological definition of ‘cult’ by Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) as ‘a set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god.’ The same dictionary gives a sociological definition of a cult as ‘a small group of religious activists whose beliefs are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic.’ Aguda (1997), Ogunbameru (1997) and the Free Encyclopedia (2006) define cult in a similar manner. In defining cultism, Azelama, Alude and Imhonde (2000) noted that “cult is an assemblage of people united by certain ideals, or symbols and whose rites and ceremonies of veneration are unique and shrouded in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken.”

Some of the most notable of these secret cults include the Black axe, Eiyé confraternity, Vikings, Amazons, Buccaneer, Mafia, and Dragons. The female students are not left out as they have their own groups which are Temple of Eden, Frigates, Barracudas, Daughters of Jezebel among others (Adewale 2005). Others are Black Cats, Trojan Horse, Black Panthers, the Twelve Disciples, Mgba Mgba Brothers, Eiyé, Maphites, The Jurists, Klu Klux Klan, The Executioners, Black Beret, Dreaded friend of friends, National Association of Adventurers, Black Scorpion, Eagle Club, Termites, Red Sea Horses, Knight Cadet, Sonmen, White Angels, Amazons, and the Black Brassieres (Opaluwah, 1999).

According to Olumuyiwa and Jegede (2007), the motives for joining these cult groups vary from one institution of higher learning to another ranging from political such as the struggle for power to influence the decision making process of the entire student body to protection from any form of harrassment. However, the major causes of cultism are attributed to poor parental upbringing, broken homes, peer influence, societal decadence, erosion of educational standards, militarization of the Nigerian polity (Ajayi, Ekundayo & Osalusi, 2010).

As a result of its alarming rate among Nigerian undergraduates, cultism needs an urgent attention and should not be handled with levity. Eradication of cultism among

Nigerian undergraduates has been of concern to many researchers and educationist because there is an increase in the number of students that join cultism in tertiary institutions.

Previous researchers have worked on cultism. For instance, Ivagher, Onyeanisi and Agugu (2016) worked on influence of cultism on the management of secondary education in Benue State of Nigeria where it was found that cultism has significant influence on examination malpractice and loss of lives and properties. Also, Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2007) carried out a research on “Menace of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: The Way Out” in which the causes, effects and prevention of cultism were discussed. However, there is a dearth of researches carried out on cultism among Nigerian undergraduates where the samples were drawn from Adeyemi College of Education (ACE), Ondo. Hence, this is the gap to be filled by the researcher.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the conduct of the study:

1. What are the causes of cultism among Nigerian undergraduates?
2. What are the consequences of cultism as perceived by students of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo?
3. What are the curbing measures for cultism among Nigerian undergraduates?

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students in Adeyemi College of Education towards cultism among Nigerian undergraduates.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. Five hundred and fifteen (515) undergraduates were randomly selected in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. The instrument used for data collection was an adapted version of questionnaire on “causes, effects and strategies for eradicating cultism among students” designed by Udoh and Ikezu (2015) with reliability co-efficient of 0.75 using test-retest method. The instrument was divided into four major sections - A contains the personal data, section B contains causes of cultism, section C - effects of cultism and section D – strategies for curbing cultism. A 4-point Likert-type scale of Strongly Agree [4], Agree [3], Disagree [2], and Strongly Disagree [1] was used to score the instrument. The instrument was given to experts in the field of Guidance and Counselling in order to ensure validity. Reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was established using split-half method.

Descriptive statistical method of analysis was employed for the research questions while t-test was used to test the research hypothesis. Calculation of the decision point or cut –off mean was arrived as follows: Strongly Agree [SA] –4 points; Agree [A] – 3points; Disagree [D] – 2 points, Strongly Disagree [SD]-1 point. Cut off mean= $(4+3+2+1) \div 4 = 2.5$. Hence the cut – off mean 2.50 implies that every mean score that is exactly or above 2.50 agrees with the decision while any score below 2.50 disagrees with the decision.

Presentation of results

Research question 1: What are the causes of cultism among Nigerian undergraduates?

Table 1: Rank ordered mean scores on causes of cultism

S/N	Item Description	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	Corruption in the society leads undergraduates to cultism	3.39	1 st	Accepted
2	Parents that are in secret cult influence their children to be cultists.	3.23	2 nd	Accepted
3	Broken Homes can lead students to cultism	3.20	3 rd	Accepted
4	Students indulge in cultism because those caught in cult activities are not prosecuted	2.60	6 th	Accepted
5	The current political trend in the country motivates undergraduates to be cultists	2.65	4 th	Accepted
6	Harsh economic situation in the country encourages cultism	2.64	5 th	Accepted
7	Inadequate funding of tertiary institutions to properly take care of students' welfare encourages cultism	2.57	7 th	Accepted

Table 1 shows that item 1 (“Corruption in the Society”) with a mean of 3.39 ranked 1st. It was followed by item 2 (“Parental influence”) which had a mean of 3.23 while item 3 (“Broken Homes”) with a mean of 3.20 ranked 3rd. The item that was ranked last (that is, 7th) was item 7(“Inadequate Funding of Tertiary Institutions”) with a mean of 2.57. In a nutshell, Mean scores of all the items on table 1 showed that all the items were generally accepted because their mean scores are greater than the cut-off mean of 2.50. This implies that all the items in table 1 are generally accepted as the causes of cultism among Nigerian Undergraduates.

Research Question 2: What are the consequences of cultism?

Table 2: Rank ordered mean score on consequences of cultism

S/N	Item Description	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	Destruction of lives of students/lecturers or institutions' properties is one of the cultist activities	3.30	2 nd	Accepted
2	Cultists engage in nefarious activities like armed robbery, internet crime etc. to meet up with their extravagant lifestyle	3.30	2 nd	Accepted
3	Diseases like Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) etc are rampant among cultists	3.26	4 th	Accepted
4	There is usually a decline in the academic performance of cultist	3.06	6 th	Accepted
5	There is increase in examination malpractice due to lackadaisical attitude of cultist towards their study	3.25	5 th	Accepted
6	Cultism could result to arrest, detention, and imprisonment of those involved in it	3.52	1 st	Accepted

According to Table 2, item 6 (“Cultism could result to arrest, detention, and imprisonment”) ranked 1st with a mean value of 3.52 while both item 1 (“Destruction of lives of students/lecturers or institutions’ properties”) and item 2 (“Engagement in nefarious activities like armed robbery, internet crime etc”) with a mean of 3.30 each ranked 2nd. Item 4 (There is usually a decline in the academic performance of cultists) which had a mean of 3.06 was ranked last, taking the 6th position. In a nutshell all the items are generally accepted as the effects of cultism among Nigerian undergraduates.

Research Question 3: What should be done to curb cultism among Nigerian undergraduates?

Table 3: Rank ordered mean scores on strategies for curbing cultism

S/N	Item Description	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	Students should be properly guided through counseling	3.38	2 nd	Accepted
2	Educational institutions' management should not take the case of cultism with levity	3.30	5 th	Accepted
3	Seminar or workshop should be organized for students (especially freshmen) on the dangers of secret cult and how to say no to cultism.	3.39	1 st	Accepted
4	High cost of education in Nigeria should be reduced	3.30	5 th	Accepted
5	Establishment of tribunal to try cultists and sentence them if found guilty	3.32	3 rd	Accepted
6	Parents should endeavour to follow up their wards in school to avoid bad company	3.31	4 th	Accepted
7	Churches and mosques should embark on youth development programme that would give the youths the forum to vent their issues	3.29	7 th	Accepted

Table 3 shows that item 3 (“Seminar or workshop should be organized for students on the dangers of secret cult and how to say no cultism”) with a mean of 3.39 ranked 1st. It was followed by item 1 (“Students should be properly guided through counselling”) which had a mean of 3.38. The item that was ranked last (that is, 7th) was item 7 (“Churches and mosques should have youth development that would give the youths the forum to vent their issues”) with a mean of 3.29. In a nutshell, all the items are generally accepted as the strategies for curbing cultism among Nigerian undergraduates.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo on cultism among Nigerian undergraduates.

Table 4: Results of t-test comparing the respondents' perception on cultism based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-calc.	t-critical
Male	298	3.28	0.891	498	0.490	1.960
Female	202	3.33	0.769			

Table 4 indicates that the calculated t-value of 0.490 was lesser than the critical t-value of 1.960 at .05 level of significance and 498 degree of freedom. Thus, the calculated t-value of 0.490 is not significant at 0.05 alpha level. On the basis of this result, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo on cultism among Nigerian undergraduates was accepted.

Discussion of the findings

Table 1 revealed that the main causes of cultism are corruption in the society (which is the leading cause of cultism), parental influence, broken homes, the current political trend in the country, harsh economic situation in the country, the fact that those that indulge in cultism are not prosecuted, and inadequate funding of tertiary institutions to acceptably take care of students' welfare.

Table 2 summarily showed that effects of cultism in tertiary institution include destruction of lives and properties of students and lecturers as well as institutions' property, spread of diseases like Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) from blood sucking during oath taken by cultists, and decline in their academic performance. Moreover, cultists have high tendency of engaging in examination malpractices and nefarious activities like armed robbery, internet crime etc.

Table 3 showed that strategies for curbing cultism among Nigerian undergraduates include guiding student properly through counselling, organizing seminar and workshop for students (especially fresh students) on the dangers of secret cults and how to say no to cultism, reduction in the high cost of education in Nigeria, establishment of tribunal to try cultist and sentence accordingly if found guilty, proper follow-up of children in school by the parents, and organizing a strong youth forum by the churches/mosques for youth to vent out their issues. Finally, educational institutions' management should not take the issue of cultism with levity.

The finding of the study (as shown in table 4) revealed that there was no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents on cultism among Nigerian undergraduates. This contradicted the finding of Olumuyiwa and Jegede (2007) which showed that there was a significant difference in the perception of male and female students on the factors associated with cultism. The possible explanation for this finding is that both the male and female students are conversant with the menace of cultism among Nigerian undergraduates.

Conclusion

It has been ascertained that the problem of cultism is a symptom of society, which is embroiled in moral decadence where institutionalized and personal violence has

become a way of life. Realizing the catastrophe of cultism on academic community, all hands must be on deck to combat the menace. It is therefore, imperative for the stakeholders in Nigerian tertiary institutions (the parents, churches, mosques, school administrators and the society at large) to fuse efforts to eradicate the menace before it destroys the whole educational system.

Recommendations

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

1. Counselling centre should be well established in every tertiary institution in Nigeria, and qualified Guidance counsellors should be employed to render guidance services for both students and staff. These counsellors are in the best position to organize seminar and workshops on cultism for students.

2. Parents should train their children in morals, and meet their needs. They should start on time to teach their wards morals and values of the society. Parents should act as model for their children to emulate. Also, they should monitor the activities of their children both in and outside the school; check the company their children keep and guide them regularly.

3. The institutions' administrators should maintain adequate inspection, supervision and monitoring of staff and students on cultism. The educational institutions' management should try as much as possible to enforce law and order in the schools and provide basic amenities that would take care of the students' welfare and make the environment conducive for studying.

4. Churches and mosques should establish strong youth department in order to give youths opportunity to vent out their issues.

5. Government should establish tribunal to try cultists, and if found guilty, they should be sentenced accordingly. This will help to deter those who have the intention of joining the secret cults.

6. High cost of education should be reduced to enable the indigent students meet up with their educational expenses, thereby giving all students opportunity to study comfortably. Thus, Government should provide the institutions with enough funds to enable them take care of their needs, since education is known to be the key for growth and development of a nation.

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