

A Survey on the Incidence of Hate Speech in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Sunusi Muhammad Kani, Ph.D

*Department of Educational Foundations
Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil
smkgwale@yahoo.com*

Ezeodo Calista Chinwe

*Department of Social Science Education
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
calista.ezeodo@unn.edu.ng*

Abstract

The study investigated types, sources and perceived strategies to curb hate speech among undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Descriptive survey design was used in the study. The population of the study comprised of 345 fourth year undergraduate students of the Departments of Science Education, Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The sample size was 190 students selected through occasional sampling technique. A questionnaire with Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.73 was used to gather data for the study. Three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test were used for data analysis. The results of the analysis revealed that religious, gender and political related hate speech are common among students within the two campuses. The findings also showed the sources of hate speech to include the internet, SUG political rallies, among others. The study equally revealed, among others, counselling students against the use of hate speech as the possible strategies for curbing hate speech among the students. It was recommended, among others, that the government should develop and implement a national hate speech policy in Nigerian universities to limit and counteract hate speech among university undergraduate students.

Keywords: hate, speech, tertiary, institutions, religious, political

Introduction

Hate speech is a common and quite an established phenomenon specifically among the Nigerian public environment. According to Joel (2012), Nigeria's history, its diversity and political landscape makes it susceptible to hate-speech. Speech is any form of expression imparting opinions or ideas to an external audience. It can be in forms of written, non-verbal, visual or artistic, and can be disseminated through any media, including internet, print, radio, or television. In its broad terms, hate speech is a communication that denigrates people on the basis of their membership to a particular group. This can include any form of expression, such as images, plays and songs as well as speech (CEPO, 2016). According to Cohen-Almagor, as cited in Elliott, Chuma, El-Gendi, Marko and Patel (2016), hate speech is defined as:

A bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It expresses discriminatory, intimidating, disapproving, antagonistic, and/or prejudicial attitudes toward those characteristics, which include gender, race, religion, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. Hate speech is aimed to injure, dehumanize, harass, intimidate, debase, degrade, and victimize the targeted groups and to foment insensitivity and brutality against them (p. 4).

Here are few other definitions of ‘hate speech’ from different institutions, as enshrined in Article 19 (2015):

“all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.”

“content that promotes violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on certain attributes, such as: race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, or sexual orientation/gender identity.”

“a form of other-directed speech which rejects the core human rights principles of human dignity and equality and seeks to degrade the standing of individuals and groups in the estimation of society.”

All the definitions cited above cover a broad range of phenomena and use highly specialized terms. For this study, the term “hate speech” is simply used to mean public statements, which are offensive to one’s religion, race, language, political inclination, indigenous origin or identity, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. In other words, it refers only to hate speech expressed in words or writing, which convey disapproval, hatred or aggression against an individual or group of individuals. Sandra (2019), noted that the Independent National Commission for Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill, prohibits the use, production, publishing, distribution, presentation, or direction of the performance of any visual or written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting or involves the use of such words in order to stir up ethnic hatred or from which ethnic hatred is likely to be stirred up against such person from an ethnic group in Nigeria. Here are some examples of hate speech commonly found within the Nigerian environment:

- viii. “If need be we should erect an iron curtain or build a great wall to keep these jihadist barbarians out of new Nigeria” (Chinweizu, 2013).

- ix. “Part of Nigeria’s difficulty in solving the Boko-haram problem is that sharia-land has a pervasive fifth column within the Nigerian government and political parties. This fifth column . . . consists of sharia-land citizens who are holding positions in Nigerian government and political parties, . . .”(Chinweizu, 2013, p. 11). .
- x. “All fingers point to Fulani and Boko Haram . . .” (Sahara Reporters, 2021)
- xi. “Military attack on Boko-haram is an attack on the North” (Reported to be said by President Buhari in Nairaland Forum, 2019)

The consequences of hate speech on the Nigerian society cannot be overlooked. Adetiba (2018) and Onanuga (2018) observe that one consequence is that investments, local or foreign, will take flight away from the spectre of hate speech. Also, hate speech serves as a distraction from unity and national development. As it emerges every day, the country is unable to come together as one to find joint solutions to the myriad of problems afflicting the country’s development just because of the distrust that emanates from hate speech. Hate speech proliferation in the internet is highly alarming (United Nations as cited in Communication Week, 2017; Onanuga, 2018). Adetiba (2018) further stresses that:

A more serious consequence is on the emotional level. We have had so many years of inter-tribal marriages that this new doctrine of East is good and West is bad or vice versa can only scramble the lives of the products of these liaisons. But the gravest by far of the consequences is the possibility of war.

To sum it up, Adibe (n. d.) is of the view that:

The problem is that hate speech is often the gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence as well as a precursor to serious harmful criminal acts. It is doubtful if there will be hate-motivated violent attacks on any group without hate speech and the hatred it purveys.

In a study conducted to evaluate the extent of hate speech utterance during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) revealed that many were used across all the mass media and none of these people who uttered them were punished. Moon (2016) has differentiated between attacks on belief and attacks on believers. Fasakin et al. (2017), therefore, recommended that political actors that engage in the use of hate speeches during electioneering should be punished according to the electoral laws of the country. Ezeibe (2017), stated that the phenomenon of hate speech has taken an extensive dimension in Nigeria, especially from 2010 to 2015. Ezeibe (2017) further observed that hate speech has become an important aspect of electioneering campaign such that numerous election related conflict in Africa are credited to hate speech. It is, therefore, alarming that in Nigeria today, undergraduate students are exposed to use of hate speeches and the undergraduate students of Kano State University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka are no exception.

However, the types and consequences of hate speech within university environments and in public spectre may differ.

More so, it needs no emphasis that one of the overall philosophies of Nigeria is to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble nation. Accordingly, one of the beliefs of Nigeria's philosophy of education is that education is to serve as an instrument for national development (FRN, 2004). It has been noted by researchers that for education to play its role in national development in Nigeria, there is need for a counselling initiative to stamp out all forms of hate speech. Indeed, the current rate of hate speech is bad for Nigeria's development and unity. The researchers are of the view that to eradicate or reduce hate speech to minimal level among undergraduate students, there is the need to identify the types, sources and possible strategies for curbing it. However, because of the fact that an academic environment differs from the other public environments, this present study specifically sought to identify:

1. The types of hate speech found in tertiary institutions.
2. The sources of hate speech within the universities.
3. The possible strategies of curbing hate speech among undergraduate students.

Research questions

Based on the specific purposes enumerated, the following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the types of hate speech found in tertiary institutions?
2. What are the sources of hate speech in tertiary institutions?
3. What are the possible strategies to curb hate speech among undergraduate students?

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on their perception of the sources of hate speech.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on their perception of the possible strategies for curbing hate speech.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The population of the study comprised of 345 fourth year undergraduate students of the Department of Science Education, Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The sample size was one hundred and ninety (190) students selected through occasional sampling technique. The instruments used for data collection were 'hate speech checklist on the types of hate speech found in tertiary institutions' and a 28-item questionnaire titled 'Undergraduate Students Hate Speech Questionnaire' (USHQ). The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree for the first

and second clusters, all with the corresponding weights of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively; whereas, the hate speech checklist was based on a 2-point rating scale of Found-1 and Not Found-2. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in Social Science Education and Measurement and Evaluation from Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Ten (10) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to undergraduate students of Federal College of Education, Kano for trial testing. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.73 was obtained.

Percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test were used for data analysis. Percentage scores of 50 - 100 were accepted. While mean responses that is equal to or greater than 2.50 was accepted, mean value less than 2.50 was rejected.

Presentation of results

The results for this study were obtained based on the research questions and hypotheses and presented in tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 as follows:

Research question one: What are the types of hate speech found in tertiary institutions?

Table 1: Types of hate speech found in tertiary institutions

S/N	Items Statement	Found		Not Found		Decision
		Freq	%	Freq	%	
1.	Race related hate speech	36	36.4	154	63.6	Not Found
2.	Gender related hate speech	134	56.5	56	43.5	Found
3.	Identity related hate speech	128	62.6	62	37.4	Found
4.	Political ideology	120	70.7	70	29.3	Found
5	Ethnic group	135	55.5	55	45.5	Found
6	Sexuality	138	52.5	52	47.5	Found
7	Age	173	17.2	17	82.8	Not Found
8	Religion related hate speech	128	62.6	62	37.4	Found

It was revealed from the data in **table 1** that items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 with percentage scores of 56.5%, 62.6%, 70.7%, 55.5%, 52.2%, and 62.6%, falls within the acceptable percentage of 50 - 100. This indicated that hate speech related to gender, identity, political ideology, ethnic group, sexuality, and religion are found in Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Similarly, the percentage scores of items 1, and 7 indicated that race and age related hate speech are not found in Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Research question two: What are the sources of hate speech in tertiary institutions?

Table 2: Sources of the hate speech in tertiary institutions

S/N	Sources of Hate Speeches	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Television	190	1.19	0.21	Rejected
2	Radio	190	1.70	0.32	Rejected
3	Newspaper	190	1.28	0.25	Rejected
4	Internet	190	3.30	0.16	Accepted
5	Off-campus conversations	190	2.79	0.21	Accepted
6	On-campus conversations	190	2.24	0.31	Accepted
7	SUG political rallies	190	2.72	0.32	Accepted
8	Students union meetings	190	1.84	0.27	Rejected
9	From academic staff	190	1.06	0.25	Rejected
10	From non-academic staff	190	1.54	0.29	Rejected
11	The students' cafeteria	190	3.32	0.19	Accepted
12	The classroom	190	1.83	0.31	Rejected
13	The mosque	190	1.24	0.51	Rejected
14	The church	190	1.45	0.42	Rejected

N= Number; SD = Standard Deviation

The mean scores presented on table 2 on sources of hate speech revealed that items 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11, which includes the internet, off-campus conversations, SUG political rallies, on-campus conversations, and the student's cafeteria are the sources of hate speech in Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. While items 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 14 with mean scores less than 2.50 revealed that hate speech are rarely heard on the television, radio, newspapers, during students congress, from academic staff, non-academic staff, classroom, mosque and church. On the other hand, the standard deviation scores of the items shows less variation in the mean responses.

Research question three: What are the possible strategies of curbing hate speech among undergraduate students?

Table 3: Possible strategies of curbing hate speech among undergraduate students

S/N	Possible Strategies	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Persuading speakers to avoid hate speech	190	2.27	0.32	Accepted
2	Public condemnation of hate speech	190	2.14	0.35	Accepted
3	Pressurizing speakers to disassociate from hate speech	190	2.20	0.51	Accepted
4	Counselling students against hate speech	190	3.28	0.45	Accepted
5	Campaign against hate speech	190	3.11	0.42	Accepted
6	Educating public on hate speech	190	3.37	0.31	Accepted
7	Promoting peace efforts	190	2.11	0.27	Accepted
8	Penalties prescribed by law	190	3.11	0.30	Accepted

N=Number; SD = Standard Deviation

The results on table 3 showed that the possible strategies to curb hate speeches in tertiary institutions are: counselling students against hate speech, public condemnation of speakers, campaigning against hate speech, educating the public on hate speech and penalizing perpetrators of hate speech. On the other hand, items 1, 3 and 7 with mean scores less than 2.50 indicated that persuading speakers, pressurizing speakers and promoting peace efforts are not perceived as strategies that can curb the menace of hate speech among the undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Ho1: There is no significant difference between undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on their perception of the sources of hate speech.

Table 4: t-test analysis of undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the sources of hate speech

	N	t	Df	sig.(2-tailed)	Decision
KUST	53	1.708	188	.001	Significant
UNN	137				

The results in table 4 revealed a t-test value of 1.708 and a p-value of .001. The p-value of .001 is lower than the benchmark of 0.05 level of significance. This indicated a significant difference in the mean ratings of undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on their perception on the sources of hate speech. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the sources of hate speech was rejected.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on their perception of the possible strategies for curbing hate speech.

Table 5: t-test analysis of male and female undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the possible strategies for curbing hate speech.

The data on table 5 indicated a t-test value of .662 and a p-value of .510. The p-value of .510 is greater than the benchmark of 0.05 at which the null hypothesis was tested. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the possible strategies for curbing hate speech was upheld.

Discussion of the findings

Results in table 1, revealed the different types of hate speech encountered by the undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Hate speech based on religion, gender and political ideology were found to be common in both universities. With reference to religious hate speech, Moon (2016), noted that it connotes attack on belief and believers. Further investigation by the researcher revealed that the hate speeches often heard by respondents are attacks on believers. Joel (2012) has reported several cases of religious hate-speech in Nigeria. Bonotti (n. d.) argued that religious believers sometimes defend their use of derogatory and extreme hate speech against members of other religious faiths as part of their religious freedom. On the hate speech related to political ideology, Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) reported that even during the 2015 general elections, the political environment was intensified with a proliferation of adverts, political innuendos and propaganda messages which had elements of hate speech. Similarly, Ezeibe (2017) confirmed that the phenomenon of hate speech has taken an extensive dimension in Nigeria, especially from 2010 to 2015. Ezeibe further observed that hate speech has become an important aspect of electioneering campaign such that numerous election-related conflicts in Africa are credited to hate speech.

The second finding of the study revealed that hate speech emanate from sources such as the internet, off-campus conversations, Student Union Government (SUG) political rallies, on-campus conversations, and in the student's cafeteria in both universities. Indeed, the United Nations (as cited in Communication Week, 2017) and Onanuga (2018) confirmed the proliferation of hate speech on the internet. Similarly, the studies by Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) and Ezeibe (2017) confirmed political party rallies as sources of political hate speeches. No doubt, one of the important revelations of this study was identifying the students' cafeteria as a source of hate speech. The students' cafeteria is an open place within the campuses where students buy and eat their food and undertake their computer business services.

The study discovered that the respondents identified counselling students against hate speech, public condemnation of speakers, campaigning against hate speech, educating the public on hate speech and penalizing perpetrators of hate speech as the possible strategies for curbing the menace of hate speech among the undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Hate speech counselling entails the process of helping perpetrators of hate speech to understand more clearly the consequences of spewing hate speech, possibly from a different view-point. This will enable such individual not to focus on negative feelings and as well will provide him/her with good insights on the dangers of hate speech with a goal to facilitate a positive change and re-orientation.

A significant difference was found in the mean ratings of undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the sources of hate speech. The revealed difference could be attributed to the locations of the

universities. Finally, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female undergraduate students of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the possible strategies for curbing hate speech.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the respondents have identified religious, gender and political related hate speech as very common in Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The study equally revealed that hate speech emanate from different sources which include the internet, off-campus conversations, student union government (SUG) political rallies, on-campus conversations, and in the student's cafeteria in both universities. More so, the study showed that counselling students against hate speech, public condemnation of speakers, campaigning against hate speech, educating the public on hate speech and penalizing perpetrators of hate speech as the possible strategies for curbing hate speech.

Recommendations

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

3. The government should develop and implement a national policy that will limit and counteract hate speech in Nigerian Universities. Without such a policy, there will be a growing risk of hate speech within and outside the universities.

4. National Universities Commission should make provision for human rights education in the university curricula with a focus on resolving the hate speech menace among university undergraduate students.

5. Professional counsellors should be engaged in guiding and creating awareness among the undergraduate students, lecturers and other university personnel, on hate speech symbolism and its negative impacts on nation building.

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