

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT OF CULTISM ON LEARNING IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between secret cultism and learning among Nigerian universities students as perceived by the students of the faculty of Education, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar. A sixteen items questionnaires developed by the researchers was validated by experts in educational research and statistics. The reliability index of .73 of the instrument was determined with split-half method on 40 students. With chi-square (X^2) analysis, the data revealed that there is a significant relationship between secret cultism in Nigerian Universities and learning by the students. It is recommended that curbing secret cultism in Nigerian Universities should be a collective responsibility of parents, teachers, religious leaders, school administrators and government through proper parental up-bringing, provision of basic amenities and effective counselling, using Rational Emotive and Behaviour Disentistization approaches.

Nigeria is a dynamic society. Changes therefore, occur over time and they usually give rise to new issues of public interest. If there is any issue of public interest these days, it is that of the quality of education. The quality or standard of education in Nigeria should be seen as a living and moving thing whose result resides on its excellence relative to certain standards, its excellence and fitness to the changing needs of a particular student and the society it is intended to serve (Fadipe & Oluchukwu, 1999). It is however opined that, students membership of secret cults seems to work against the realization of the desired qualitative education in Nigerian universities.

Thus, this paper examines the degree of the supposed relationship between secret cultism and learning among students in the Nigerian universities.

What is Cultism?

A cult can be said to emanate from excessive admiration or belief in a person or idea. This could be manifested in rituals, praises, songs, chants and worship. It is a practice that may be difficult to dislodge even with superior argument. Secret cult could therefore be defined as a group of people who share and propagate particular secret beliefs revealed only to members (Orukpe, 1988). The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary (1988) defines cult as a system of religious worship, admiration of/or a devotion to a person or thing, especially as a form of intellectual snobbery, a passing craze of fashion, a creed or sect. According to Denga (1991), cultism is a system of religious beliefs and practice or an ideology. To Mberu (1999), cult is a religion that is totally withdrawn from and often at odds with the religious traditions of the society. Therefore, cultists on their own promote variant values and behaviour. A cult according to Oguntuase (1977) is a group of cultists engaged in a form of rituals that binds them to a common destiny non-members do not know anything about, that is confidential and known to only the members. Secret cult could therefore be defined as a set of values, belief system, practices or idea whose essence is known only to their caucus members and is excessively admired and defended by them even to the point of death.

Cultism has been in existence in Nigeria since the pre and post independent days. These include the Ekpe society (Cross River State), the Ekpo society (Akwa Ibom State), the Eyo society (Lagos), the Ogboni Fraternity and Oboni Society (Ikwere Land), the Odumu Masquerade (Okrika Land) to mention but a few. These societies have their belief system which was seriously protected. A secret cult within an educational institution according to Ibgorgbor (2006) is a group of students bound together with oath of secrecy to invite strange, supernatural and mysterious powers to guide and protect them.

What is known as secret cult in Nigerian Universities today is traceable to the formation of the Pirate Confraternity (Sea Dogs) at the University of Ibadan in 1952 by Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's only Nobel laureate to date and others including Aig-Imonkhuede, Pius Oleghe, Ralph Opara, Nat Oyelola, Dr. Olu Ogunloye and Prof. Muiyiwa Awe (Chukwuka, 1999; Onodaro, 1999). Their main objectives included: to lobby group of students in order to reach and discuss with the University authority, to inspire patriotic sentiments, to check the neo-colonialist mentality spreading among the nation's educated class due to Western education (Okwo, 2006), to abolish convention, to revive the age honoured behaviour, and to end tribalism and elitism. The group was not to harm, maim, kill and destroy as their cohesiveness and absolute allegiance to rules made it become an elite club, only for the cleanest, brightest and the politically conscious students (Okwo, 2006) This implies that at that time, violence was never to manifest in the conduct of its members. Their existence was well known by students

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and was not associated with weird, horrible and spiteful character of the latter day cultists.

According to Orintusin (1990), the aims of the Sea Dogs Confraternity were to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively the imposition of foreign conventions, to revive the age chivalry and find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism. Also, the group was to see to improve funding and provision of recreational academic facilities in the University. The above aims of the Pyrates Confraternity were abandoned, therefore the confraternity gradually metamorphosed into secret cult that was later to proliferate into many splinter groups.

The abandonment of the Sea Dogs and the proliferation of the confraternity was due to doctrinal differences (Thomas, 2002) and the inability of intending members to meet required standards of the Pyrates Confraternity such as high academic standard thus, the protestant ones started emerging. The change was equally accelerated by yet other changes taking place both at the universities and the entire Nigerian society. Changes observable in the Nigerian society included violent military coups, state sponsored political assassination, proliferation of ethnic militia, communal clashes and total erosion of the traditional family values. Changes occurring within the universities include over-crowdedness, under funding, deteriorated infrastructure and lack of virile student union activities. The first notable departure came in 1968 with formation of Eiyeye Confraternity at the University of Ibadan (Adelola, 1997) which according to Owoeye (1997), had sprung up from the Buccaneers which also had sprung up from the Sea Dogs.

There are about 45 secret cult groups in Nigerian Universities (Nwadike, 2003). These are Black Axe, Black Cats, Trojan Horse, Black Panthers, The Twelve Disciples, Mgba Mgba Brothers, Eiyeye, Maphites, Temple of Edem, the Jurists, Klu Klu, the Executioners, Black Beret, Draded Friend of Friends, National Association of Adventures, Black Scorpion, Eagle Club, Termites, Red Seas Horses, Nkight Cadet, Sonman, White Angels, Amazons, Daughters of Jezebel, the Black Brassiers, Sea Dogs, Vikings, Buccaneer Confraternity, , Frame Royal, Queens, Palm wine Drinkers Association, Phoenix, Black Cobra, Malcom X, Egbedudu, Charles Angle, Green Barrette, Light Cadets, God Father, National Association of Air Lords, Gentlemen's Club, Stones and Rebels, Blood Line, Mice Black Movement and Swastiker.

Effects of Cultism on Learning

The effects of secret cult on the learning students in Nigerian Universities cannot be overemphasized as both the intra and inter-cult activities negatively affect students in amazing proportions. Thus, cult clashes lead to outbreak of violence on campuses which leave many students wounded, maimed or killed as the case may be. Such situations may lead to the incarceration, rustication or expulsion of students which usually affect the learning process of the institution. The situation also sometimes,

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results in the closure of the University for quite a long time and this has negative effect on the implementation of academic programmes.

There is no gainsaying that cult clashes adversely affect the psyche of the students and peace on the campus thus, affecting learning of the students. Activities of secret cult groups may be so serious that the destruction of basic infrastructures and other resources will be colossal and eventually, the money that would have been spent on the provision of other facilities and infrastructures on the campus are now used in replacing the damaged ones. This definitely results in the reduction of the quality and quantity of education in the Universities.

Cult members hardly have time for studies. As a result, most of them fail their examinations and are expelled from school. Ranking of the opinion of 150 teachers on activities of students which constitute tendencies toward secret cult, by Efiom (1997) placed dislike for academic activities 10th. Whenever a member is expelled from school on grounds of poor academic performance, cult members most times generate troubles which cause other students to riot. The situation often results in destruction of the school properties. Cultists are not always in classes, these results in not knowing what the class is doing and where the classmates are, hence they end up as examination cheats and also perform very poorly in their courses. In most cases, they are caught for examination malpractice offences and are rusticated consequently (Otoibhi, 1999; Igborgbor, 2006).

As reported by Igborgbor, (2006), for cult members to have their way, they disrupt examinations whenever they are not ready. A case of Delta State University comes to mind, when a male student of University of Benin was hired to write an examination for the girl friend. To escape arrest, he fired gun shots in the examination hall, thereby causing confusion and so disrupted the examination.

The quality of education in Nigeria is the interest of the citizenry. Education should be seen as a dynamic thing and not static, therefore should promote excellence in standard and fitness of the graduates to the changing needs of the society. It is rather observed that, the activities of secret cult groups are turbulent and constitute a clog in the wheel of educational progress. Cult related activities in Nigerian universities result in producing graduates who know next to nothing in their various field of study (Kpangban, Umudhe and Ajaja, 2008). Though there are many researches these cankerworm groups, the student's perception of the impact of cultism on their learning are rarely studied. There is need therefore to seek the perception of the students if the problem of cultism is to be handling successfully.

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between cultism and learning as perceived by the students in Nigerian universities for effective management

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and counselling of non-cult membership and the cult members. The study is also designed to confirm or reject the observations of researchers on issue.

Research Question

The research question below guided the study

Has cultism any significant relationship with learning in Nigerian Universities?

Research Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study, thus:

There is no significant relationship between cultism and learning in Nigerian Universities.

Methodology

The population of the study comprised of 1,750 students of the Faculty of Education, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar from where 350 (three hundred and fifty) representing 20% of the population were drawn as sample through simple random sampling technique. Data for this study were generated using a 16 (sixteen) item questionnaire developed by the researchers titled “Secret Cultism and Learning Questionnaire” (SCLQ). The instrument was face validated by two experts in research, test and measurement.

The reliability of the instrument was determined with split-half method and it’s associated Spearman Brown. The reliability index of .73 was arrived at. The validated instrument consisting 20 items was divided into two parts. The first part was constructed to gather personal information and the second part was to elicit information on the relationship between cultism and learning. The instrument only required the respondents to tick (√) “Yes” “No”.

The instrument was administered personally by the researchers to the respondents with the help of their lecturers. Out of 350 copies of the questionnaire administered, 337 were correctly completed and returned representing 96.3% return rate.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using (χ^2) chi-square test and the result is presented in table 1 below. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1
Chi-square (χ^2) Analysis of Relationship Between Secret Cultism and Learning among Nigerian Universities Students.

S/N	ITEM	FREQ.	YES	NO	X ²	DECISION
1	Secret cultism takes a lot of student’s learning time.	Obs. Exp.	249 168.5	88 168.5	76.98	***

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2	Secret cultism leads to reduction in genuine academic achievement	Obs. Exp.	266 168.5	71 168.5	112.83	***
3	Most rusticated students of Nigerian Universities are secret cult members.	Obs. Exp.	234 168.5	103 168.5	50.9	***
4	Cultists often disrupt examination to have their way because they or their members are not ready.	Obs. Exp.	187 168.5	150 168.5	4.1	*
5	Cultism has nothing to do with learning.	Obs. Exp.	173 168.5	164 168.5	.240	NS
6	Violent clashes by rival cult groups often lead to closure of the institution thus disrupting academic activities	Obs. Exp.	204 168.5	133 168.5	14.96	*
7	Most students with high grades in Universities are cult members.	Obs. Exp.	174 168.5	163 168.5	.36	NS
8	Cultism on campus leads to certificates no being backed up with hard work and true academic struggle.	Obs. Exp.	108 168.5	229 168.5	43.45	**
9	Cult activities lead to reduction in manpower quality.	Obs. Exp.	219 168.5	118 168.5	30.27	**
10	Cult members remain in school longer than necessary.	Obs. Exp.	230 168.5	107 168.5	44.90	***
11	Many cult members remain in school longer than necessary.	Obs. Exp.	180 168.5	157 168.5	1.57	NS
12	Cult members are often absence from classes.	Obs. Exp.	200 168.5	137 168.5	11.78	*
13	Cultist fails their examinations often.	Obs. Exp.	192 168.5	145 168.5	6.56	*
14	Most cultists often find it difficult to settle down to learn.	Obs. Exp.	215 168.5	122 168.5	25.67	**
15	During violence by cultists. School properties are looted; buildings and cars are burnt thus resulting in closing down of the school.	Obs. Exp.	266 168.5	71 168.5	112.8	***
16	The funds used for replacing damaged properties of the school hinder educational development.	Obs. Exp.	200 168.5	137 168.5	11.78	*

P. = <.05; df = 1; critical value = 3.85; Obs = Observes frequency; Exp = expected frequency.

*** = Highly significant; ** = significant; *=Low significant; NS = Not significant.

From the table above, the X^2 analysis of the items showed that except for item 5, 7 and 11, all other items of the questionnaire on secret cultism were significantly relating to student's learning in the Nigerian Universities. Thus:

- Secret cultism takes a lot of student's time.
- Secret cultism leads to reduction in genuine academic achievement.
- Some rusticated students of Nigerian universities are secret cult members.
- Most cult members remain in school longer than necessary.
- Cultism on campus leads to certificates not being backed up with hard work and true academic struggle.
- Cult activities lead to reduction in manpower quality.

Discussion

The study sought the opinion of students on the relationship between secret cultism and learning among students in Nigerian Universities. The results revealed that secret cultism takes a lot of students' time. This leads to reduction in genuine academic achievement of students. The above result supports Efiom (1999) that cultist dislike academic activities because they do not have the time to face the academic work. As a result Kpangban, Umudhe and Ajaja (2008) opined that cultism and cult related activities in Nigerian institutions of higher learning result in producing graduates who know next to nothing in their various fields of study.

The result also revealed that most expelled students of Universities are cultists for they disrupt examinations, spearhead violence and are involved in examination malpractice. This was reported by Igborgbor (2006) and Kpangban (2008). The finding also showed that clashes between rival groups mostly result in destruction of school properties and closure of institutions and the funds used for the replacement would have gone a long way in providing new facilities in the schools thus, hindering the development and provision of infrastructures (Kpangban, 2008). Contrary to Kpangban (2008) who observed that some cultists remain in school longer than necessary, for this study the reverse was the case. This may be because they are expelled from the institution before the expected graduation date.

Counselling Approaches for Curbing Secret Cultism

Following the complexities of our dynamic society vis-à-vis secret cultism in our Universities, the counsellor has the responsibility of salvaging the school and the students in terms of learning, adjustment and development with the following approaches among others.

- a) Rational Emotive Therapy in which the counsellor exposes the students to the dangers associated with secret cultism such that the each will on his/her own, decide to disentangle himself/herself from cultism and other anti social behaviours.

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- b) Behaviours disentanglement therapy, which considers the fact that, a major factor of cult membership is the peer group influence. The approach is to desensitize youths from certain fixations which they might imbibed through peer associations.

Conclusion

The virally spread of cultism among students of Universities in Nigeria has contributed to the general decline in the quality of learning and of the graduates being turned out by the Universities. This is because secret cultism and learning move in opposite directions. The social vice should therefore be fought to its eradication. The responsibility of curbing the activities of secret cultism in our Universities should be a collective responsibility resting on the shoulders of the students, parents, counsellors, teachers, religious leaders, Universities authorities as well as the government.

Recommendations

The findings that there is a significant relationship between cultism of students in Nigerian Universities and learning informed the following recommendations:

- Proper moral upbringing of children and wards by parents and guardians respectively is strongly advocated as curbing strategy to cultism in Nigerian Universities, because if proper guidance of the child in terms of successful life is given in the family, the child will be better informed about life.
- The students should be properly counselled on peer group relationship. The counsellor has the responsibility of letting the individual child/student realize that cultism is a vice that destroys the school system and take a decision on which friend to keep.
- For effective administration of the tertiary institutions, anti-cult clubs should be formed in all Universities. Through these anti-cult activities, the ills of cultism would be exposed in all its ramifications to the University community.
- Group counselling and seminars should be organised periodically by the institutions' authorities to give assurance of life and hope to the students, specially the new intakes at the beginning of new sessions.
- All the necessary laws concerning secret cultism in the Universities should be enforced religiously to serve as a deterrent to those intending to be cult members.
- Students should be oriented to imbibe the values and norms of higher institutions. During such orientation programmes, information should be given about the menace of cult activities; such programme should be organized per semester.

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