

**EFFECT OF CULTISM AND OTHER SOCIAL VICES ON
THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF COLLEGES OF
EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH
REGION OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study was saddled with the responsibility of investigating the effect of cultism on the academic achievement of colleges of education students in the south-south region of Nigeria. The teachers who are trained in these colleges serve as middle manpower to teach in the primary and junior secondary levels of education in Nigeria. A survey design was adopted for the study. Three research questions were posed. A simple percentage was used to find out how ignorance, parental background and upbringing affect students' membership of secret cults vis-à-vis students achievement academically. The researcher observed that: students' parental background and upbringing influenced membership of secret cults such that students of rich, influential and poor religious background were more vulnerable to secret cult membership; ignorance also influenced fresh student's membership of secret cults. Based on the findings, conclusion and recommendations were made.

Keywords: Cultism, Social Vices, Academic Achievement

Cultism is one of the most embarrassing problems challenging tertiary institutions in the south-southern region of Nigeria. The menace of cultism in our institutions of higher learning is increasing making our society unsafe. Virtually all segments of our society had become prone to the pervasive influence of violence, especially campus violence. Never before has the desire for the destruction of lives and property in our society been so great or escalated so fast and out of proportion as now. There is hardly any academic session that passes without reported cases of murder, rape, maiming, and assaults in our tertiary institutions. Okwu (2006) reported that an estimated five thousand students and lecturers had lost their lives in Nigerian institutions of higher learning as a result of cult-related violent clashes.

The umbrella name of groups that unleash terror in academic communities across Nigeria is called secret cult. Ogunbameru (2004) defined secret cult as any form of organization whose activities are not only 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. They are secret to the extent of their subterranean nature which is manifested by their secret membership, assemblies, rituals and violent methods. Okwu (2006) viewed cultism as barbaric, clandestine and a diabolical evil association that has lost contact with sanity and acceptable societal norms.

The recent destructive cult activities on campuses are mind-boggling, irritating and distasteful. These clandestine and violent activities include amongst others: extortion, rape, blackmail, arson, robbery, and drug abuse, drug trafficking, kidnapping/abduction, hijacking, maiming and murder. Lives of promising young men and women had been led astray or cut short in the hands of these bloody and murderous gangs on campus. Secret cultism is an evil wind that does no one any good. Parents, lecturers and law enforcement agents must work in synergy to ensure that this evil is put under control in our environment.

Involvement in secret cults in our Colleges of Education has ruined the lives of thousands of our talented youths in south-south region of Nigeria and the world at large. It is however on record that most of the casualties of secret cultism membership is by ignorance. Some of the pseudo reasons for joining secret cult and its attendant dangers are highlighted herein.

Statement of the Problem

Cultism in our Institutions and our societies has left much to be desired. Many of our youths are drop-outs, street boys and girls, have been maimed and many have even lost their lives thereby leaving parents and loved ones in perpetual agony.

Members of the public and the cultists themselves attribute this to ignorance, to greed, parental upbringing etc.

The researcher is therefore interested to find out what leads young people to these cult groups and how it affects their academic achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which secret cults influence academic achievement of students in the south-south region Colleges of Education.

Research Questions

The researcher will attempt to answer the following questions among others:

- (a) How do fresh students suddenly become secret members on campus?
- (b) Is student membership of cultism influenced by parental background/upbringing?
- (c) How does cultism affect students' academic achievement?

Literature Review

The review covers the following headings

- **History and Membership of Secret Cultism in Nigeria**
- **Pseudo Reasons for Joining Campus Secret Cults**
- **Dangers of Secret Cultism**

History and Membership of Secret Cultism in Nigeria

Campus cultism can be traced back to the early 1950s when Prof. Whole Soyinka and some of his friends (OluAunlaye, Olumuyiwa, Awe, Ralph Opara, Tunki Tubi, Pius Olegbe) established the pirates confraternity at the University of Ibadan as a social club (Orintusin, 1990). The ideas behind the formation of the confraternity were patriotic and altruistic as it was not imagined as a secret cult. The main objectives of the group were: to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively against the imposition of foreign conventions, to revive the age of chivalry and to find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and ethnicity. Over the years similar groups assumed very dangerous dimensions.

Today there are about forty-five (45) secret cults operating in our tertiary institutions of learning and are all equipped with an elaborate hierarchy, insignia and distinct attire. Some of the most notable secret cults include: Black axe, Eiyconfraternity, Vikings, Amazons, Buccaneer, Mafia and Dragons. The female students are not left out as they have their own groups such as Temple of Eden, Frigates, Barracuda, Daughters of Jezebel among others (Adewale, 2005).

Membership of Secret Cults across all Sexes, Classes and Ages

It is not restricted to a particular area of the country, but the menace is more pronounced in the campuses located in the southern part of Nigeria. However the prime movers are the children of the rich and powerful who finance their activities. Membership of cults is said to involve oath-taking with blood and the drinking of a certain concoctions as part of initiation rites. Members equally take oath not to reveal the identity of their members and their activities to outsiders.

The secret activities of secret cult include:

- a. Meeting in very odd places like cemeteries, valleys or abandoned buildings
- b. The use of dangerous weapons such as knives, daggers, guns, axe and arrows against erring members or non-members
- c. Hand warfare, burglary, killing, thuggery, assault, torture etc
- d. Taking of hard drugs, drinking of human blood
- e. Acid bathe
- f. Extravagant spending on non-profit ventures

Pseudo Reasons for Joining Campus Secret Cults

So many reasons had been advanced on why students join secret cults. These reasons range from peer group influence, parental background, economic circumstance, falling standard of education, societal decadence to militarization of our polity.

Ibeh (2005) noted that the stage of adolescence is marked by a shift of emphasis on social relationship from parents to the peer group. Omoegun and Akanle (2007) reported that peer group influence is one of the reasons students join cultism.

Students of responsible disciplined homes usually resist the temptation of membership of secret cults unlike students from delinquent homes. Olajugbe (2001) reported that poor parental background, lack of moral instruction at home and the manner in which the child is brought up could be a factor in enrolment as a member of a cult group. Weak and defective family background as well as frustration arising from broken homes are driving forces of students membership of secret cults (Ogunbamem, 2004).

The falling standards in our educational system arising from corruption has also been a motivating factor for student's membership of cultism. Most students gained admission into colleges of Education through the "back door" and with questionable credentials. Due to the low self image of such students, they find solace in secret cults in order to survive in the new environment they find themselves. Akinfolarin (2003) reported that students admitted illegally resort to cultism and other social vices in order to survive and succeed.

Omoegun and Akanle (2007) observed that the Nigerian society has willingly or unwillingly provided an enabling environment in for all forms of crimes among which is the problem of campus cultism. They further suggested that universities should be re-organised, properly funded and provided with games so that youthful exuberances of students will find a rewarding outlet in competitive sports like football and athletics which could engage students in their spare times. Youths nowadays imbibe immoral values instead of inculcating moral and decent values. Wilson (2000) observed that some students are said to join cults because they want to belong to this type of class that is seen as “macho”.

Ibeh (2005), Omoegun and Akanle (2007) and Ajayi *et al.*, (2010) outlined the following as reasons why students join secret cults. These include:

- ❖ *Inherent instincts in human beings to inflict pain, punishment and even death on fellow human beings.*
- ❖ *Hostile and uncaring parenting*
- ❖ *Failing or expelled students seeking to set the college on rampage*
- ❖ *Rivalry and competition as a result of seeking for girls, protection from boys of rival cult groups, protection from victimization from lecturers*
- ❖ *Peer influence etc.*
- ❖ *Militarization of the Nigerian polity*
- ❖ *Erosion of educational standards*
- ❖ *Societal decadence.*

Wilson (2000) also highlighted academic inadequacy, financial difficulties, drugs, sexual relationship, home/family background, lack of counseling, poor accommodation, wrong choice of programme, social mal-adjustment, admission of academically weak candidates, lack of effective and prompt disciplinary mechanism in schools etc as likely causes of student’s membership of cult groups.

Dangers of Secret Cultism

A secret cultist is exposed to all sort of anti-human vices. Belonging to a secret cult, dehumanizes and renders the individual, a dependent factor. The cultist losses his independence to a group of dis-oriented persons. Freedom of mine and action is very free and deserves to stay free. If God has given you the freedom of thinking why should you then submit your thoughts to the directives of a backward and evil group, whose sole agenda is to intimidate, maim and kill. Okwu (2006)

Opaluwah (2009) stated that the attendant effects of cultism on the learning process cannot be exhausted as both intra and inter cult clashes negatively affect the student. He further stated that it could lead to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of

both innocent and guilty students' members. Jamiu (2008) that negative effects of cultism could include: loss of lives/properties, disruption of school calendar, examination mal-practice, poor academic performance, insecurity, spiritual and emotional trauma, stigmatization, blurring of the vision of the country, rape with the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS, rustication, expulsion among others.

A cultist is simply a criminal, he becomes notorious rather than being popular. When a crime is committed anywhere they are the prime suspects as cultist. This is because the activities of a cultist are similar to those of an armed robber.

Students who join the cult, begin to stay away from lectures and are then tempted to engage in examination malpractice. The cult world is a dangerous one. He/she is always at war with people. The members of other cult groups are after the cultist and his/her conscience hunts them. Cultists fail to realize that it is even their colleague in the cult, those who wine and dine with them that tell others about their activities (Omoegun and Akanle, 2007).

Research Design

The design used in this research was the survey design. This design is basically concerned with finding out and describing "what is". Survey design deals with conditions or relationship that exist; practices that prevail and attitudes that are held.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of about fifty-five thousand (55,000) students in all the Colleges of Education in the south southern region of Nigeria.

Sampling Technique

Seven (7) out of ten (10) Colleges of Education were randomly selected and used for the study. The seven institutions selected have a total student enrolment of thirty five thousand (35,000) students. The seven institutions selected have a total student enrollment of about thirty-five thousand (35,000) students. A percentage of ten (10%) representing three thousand five hundred (3500) of the total student enrollment in the selected institutions was used for the study. Consequently, five hundred (500) students per selected school were randomly selected for the study.

The institutions selected were four (4) stated owned colleges of education: Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa; College of Education, Afaha Nsit, Akwa Ibom State; College of Education, Ekaidolor Edo State, Rivers State College of Education Port Harcourt, Federal College of Education Obudu, Cross River State; Federal College of Education Asaba Delta State and Federal College of Education Omoko, Rivers State.

This selection was made to obtain a fair representation of the sample in each of the seven institutions selected.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a self structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was a 17-item structured questionnaire designed on a “Yes” or “No” response format. The questionnaire items were divided into four sections in respect of the stated research questions.

Items 1-4 (reasons willingness or otherwise for joining cults), items 5-8 (socio-economic benefits of cult membership), items 9-12 (parental background favourable or otherwise for cultism) and items 13-17 (cultism and academic achievement of students).

Frequency counts and simple percentages were employed to analyse the data collected as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Responses of questionnaire items 1-17.

S/No	Item		Response	
			Frequency	Percentage %
1	Intentional joining of secret cult	Yes	875	29.0
		No	2141	71.0
2	Tricking of people into cultism	Yes	2190	72.6
		No	826	27.4
3	Use of threat and intimidation in canvassing for members by cult groups	Yes	2334	77.4
		No	682	22.6
4	Use of false promises to campaign for members	Yes	2214	73.4
		No	802	26.6
5	Cultism as an avenue for social interaction and acceptability	Yes	1167	38.7
		No	1849	61.3
6	Cultism and provision of security on campus	Yes	802	26.6
		No	2214	73.4
7	Cultism and free access to clothing, drinks, food etc	Yes	1556	51.6
		No	1460	48.4
8	Role of secret cult in settling members bills	Yes	657	21.8
		No	2359	78.2

9	Secret cult membership and single parent/broken	Yes	2190	72.6
		No	826	27.4
10	Secret cult membership and relationship with old cult relatives	Yes	2190	72.6
		No	826	27.4
11	Cult membership and healthy parental background	Yes	2310	76.6
		No	706	23.4
12	Cult membership and religious parental background	Yes	2262	75.0
		No	754	25.0
13	Cultism and academic performance	Yes	2458	81.5
		No	558	18.5
14	Cultism and successful academic	Yes	2482	82.3
		No	534	17.7
15	Cult membership and link with crime committed in their vicinities	Yes	2407	79.8
		No	609	20.2
16	Secret cultism and vulnerability to crime	Yes	2407	79.8
		No	609	20.2
17	Cultists not deriving promised benefits	Yes	1677	55.6
		No	1339	44.4

Result and Discussions

The data obtained in respect of “the effect of cultism and other social vices on the academic achievement of students in Colleges of Education in the south southern region of Nigeria” during field survey is presented and discussed in the table below. Results obtained showed that eight hundred and seventy five (875) respondents representing 29% agreed that people intentionally and knowingly join secret cults, while two thousand one hundred and forty one (2141) respondents representing 71% are of the opinion that people do not intentionally join the secret cult. Consequently 72.6% of the respondents are of the opinion that people are usually being tricked into secret cult membership. This finding agrees with Omoegun and Akanle (2007), and Jamiu (2008) who posited that some fresh students are lured into cult membership on the guise of attending parties. Two thousand three hundred and thirty four (2334) respondents representing 77.4% agreed that cult groups usually employ threat and

intimidations in canvassing for members while another 73.4% of the respondents agreed that cult groups also make use of false promises in campaigning for membership.

One thousand one hundred and sixty seven (1,167) respondents representing 61.3% opined that cultism is not an avenue for social interaction and acceptability in the society. Majority of the respondents representing 73.4% disagreed with the concept that membership of a cult group provides one with security on campus. On the issue of free access to clothing, drinks, food etc, 51.6% of the sample responded in affirmation while 48.4% of the respondents disagreed. Two thousand three hundred and fifty nine respondents representing 78.2% are of the view that cult groups do not provide their members with funds for settling their bills like house rent, electricity, school fees etc (Table 1).

Two thousand one hundred and ninety (2190) respondents representing 72.6% of the sample are of the opinion that most secret cult membership come from broken and single parent households, with relatives who had been or are still members of cult groups. Another 76.6% of the sample agreed that most members of the secret cult come from wealthy homes, with poor religious background or morality. This agrees with the observations of Wilson (2000) and Akinfolarin (2003).

An overwhelming two thousand four hundred and fifty eight respondents representing 81.5% of the sample agrees that cultists are never do well academically and most of them end up unsuccessful with academic certificates. Also 79.8% of the sample opined that cult members are usually prime suspects of crimes committed in their vicinities and are more prone and vulnerable to committing crimes than non cultists. Similarly, 55.6% of the sample maintained that cultists do not eventually derive the benefits usually promised them as baits to lure them into cult membership whereas 44.4% of the sample was indifferent.

Conclusion

Cultism is on the increase in our institutions of higher learning and especially in colleges of education in south south Region of Nigeria. This might be as a result of the way the society celebrates mediocres in the name of cultists and partly in the way politicians use them as ready tools to bulldoze their way to power and reward them with material gifts (cars, money appointments etc). It is interesting to state categorically clear that the demerits of cultism outweighs its merits which is seen in its negativities Such as loss of lives, disruption of school calendar, poor academic performance, insecurity, loss of public reputation, stigmatization etc. These vices will ultimately lead to loss of value of an individual.

Recommendations

In view of the numerous vices associated with cultism and the overwhelming need to dwell in a peaceful and progress oriented atmosphere, parents, religious organizations and the government have a responsibility here. The following recommendations will suffice:

- Parents must give their children proper parental guidance to avoid bad peer influence.
- Religious institutions must inculcate the right values and norms that will instill the fear of God and right attitudes in our youths.
- Educational curriculum must be reviewed to give our youths a sense of direction and the acquisition of right skills and competence.
- Government must enact stringent laws against cultism and be prepared to punish offenders
- Further research should be conducted on a similar topic to over more Institutions in Nigeria as well as other countries for proper generalization of results.

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