

Exploring the perception of cultism by undergraduate students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perception of cultism by undergraduate students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu, Nigeria. The study was necessitated by the observable high rate of cult-related activities being perpetuated and the need to discover the factors behind this social malady. Frustration aggression and social conflict theories were adopted as the theoretical framework. The study revealed among other things that male respondents' are more likely to be aware of cult-related activities than their female respondents'. The further showed that the majority of the respondents supported the expulsion of students involved in cult-related activities. Based on these findings, the study recommended that educational policies that are more proactive and stringently enforceable should be extended to other universities and the school authority should ensure that unqualified students are not granted entry. More so, the guidance and counseling department of the institution should strategize on a new sensitization mechanism that will penetrate and unlock the hearts of those who has the potential to become a cultist.

Keywords: Cultism, Higher institutions, Perception, Social malady, Students

INTRODUCTION

The most common phenomenon facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the problem of cultism. There is no long existing single institution of higher learning that has not experienced the menace of cultism for one time or another. As we have today, the menace and the aggressiveness of cult members and cult-related violent clashes and activities on most tertiary institutions campuses have not only caused the sudden death of lecturers and students but also the destruction of valuable properties. According to Usman[1], there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is presently on the grip of alarming social vices, notable among which is cultism, following screaming headlines on activities of cultists which have led to loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties, almost on daily basis. There is rarely no academic session without reported incidents of cult-related violent clashes in most schools in country, which usually result in the loss of lives of promising youths. Cultism in Nigeria could be traced to pre-colonization when a group of people with the main aim of seeking protection from their ancestors conducted rituals. Secret cults have always existed in many parts of the country, with the Ogboni secret cult notable among the Yorubas, the Ekpe secret cult among the Efiks, Ekine cult in the Delta region and Owegbe cult among the Edo[2]. According to Bello[3], what is known as campus cultism in tertiary institutions started at The University College, Ibadan, Nigeria in 1952. It was formed by Nigeria's only Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and six others who founded the Pirates Confraternity. The other six are Olumuyiwa Awe, Ralph Opara, Tunji Tubi, Aig Imokhuede, Pius Olegbe and Olu Agunloye. Their main objectives included the abolition of convention; the revival of the age of chivalry and to end tribalism, to elevate the social life of the university campus where orderliness and discipline could be planted in the mind of students/youths who were expected to be future leaders in Nigeria and elitism. Onoyase, Onoyase and Arubayi[4] lamented that little did Soyinka and his friends realized that they were making history nor did they come to terms with the fact that students and indeed youths radicalism was being

given a national boost and the unleashing of a national vanguard. The development was paradoxical to the extent, that they little realized that they were laying the foundation for what was to be transformed eventually into gansterism. According to Muhammed et al.[5], secret cult is an enclosed organized association of group devoted to the same cause. It is an enclosed group having an exclusive sacred ideology and series of rites centering around their secret symbols. Cultic activities are sometimes laden with blood. It may be the blood of an animal or that of human beings. He claimed that during initiation rites or during rival group clashes within the University setting, blood flows during which many lives are lost in the process. Nche [6], defined cultism as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike. Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi [7] asserted that confraternities operated at no degree of violence when they emerged in the 1950's. Unfortunately, they were later hijacked by military governments who were anxious to consolidate their holds on University students who might challenge their authorities. For example, virile student Unionism was perceived by military authorities as a threat to their power consolidation. Consequently, secret cults were used to neutralize student unions and their "anti-government activities", especially those which questioned or challenged the authorities of military dictatorship. Consequently, what started as club or some socially conscious students, who chose to be "different" has become club of blood thirsty and blood sucking monsters who parade themselves as students. Despite the evil perception about cultism, some students still find it fashionable to blend or join cults groups for different reasons. According to Usman[1], the major reason for forming cult group at the earlier stage was to break the barrier created by the advantaged students. But sadly, there is now a yawning shift from its original purpose as it tends to strive more on intimidation, oppression and brutalization of rival cult groups leading to violence many of which proved fatal. Not only has cultism witnessed a shift from its original purpose, membership now cuts across artisans, farmers, traders and so many illiterates across the country! From the North to the South and East to the West, cultism strives everywhere! Investigation on why artisans take to this unwholesome and dreadful secret cults showed that while some of them are used as errands boys by some politicians, particularly during elections, others joined confraternity groups for protection against other rival cult members, and to gain financial assistance from politicians and some members of the elite who want to attack their opponents[8]. To Whitsett and Kent[9], students join cult for certain factors such as protection, sense of identity, deception, family background, the Western media and role models. Rotimi[10], argues that students are attracted to cultist groups for a variety of reasons. He noted that generally, the social atmosphere prevailing in Nigeria Universities provides an inspiring environment for secret cults to thrive. These may include lack of virile student unionism, individual/private universities where the security system is not tight, erosion of the traditional academic culture; absence of intellectual debates and all other activities that are components of traditional campus culture. It is against the menace of cultism that every institution forms anti-cult groups and various means to provide normal school situation where people feel comfortable as the academic environments in the campuses are usually very conducive without disturbances. It is based on this that Kalu[11] argued that peace, safety and security are both necessary and indispensable requirements for development and the attainment of good quality of life for any human society. To Chikwendu, Nwankwo and Oli[12], it is against this backdrop that the delivery of safety and security is considered a justifiable public good and the very essence of the state. And to Szpak[13], human safety and security are indeed human rights having a value of their own and serving an instrumental function in the construction of human contentment and prosperity. There have been various crusades against cultism in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. These crusades include: organizing seminars, mounting bill boards that indicate how cultism ruin students lives, encouraging students to join religious groups, forming students anti-cult group and tightening security situation of the school. Afolayan and Arogundade[14] argues that the crusade on cultism is to create awareness among parents, encourage students to join approved religious groups such as Scripture Union in schools for morals and spiritual awareness and security in God. Moral upbringing is very essential in one's life for there is a saying "Direct the child the way he/she should go and he will never depart from it". Yet despite these crusades, some students still find cultism fashionable to join.

Problems of Cult related activities in Higher Institutions

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[15]. According to Bukola[16], cult members hardly have time for studies. As a result, most of them fail their examinations and are expelled from school. 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[17].

Edoro[18] argues further that 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. It has been 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. Alhassan[19] maintains that the higher education system in Nigeria is under siege, bombardment and almost ruined by secret cults. Thus majority of the students, lecturers and their families live in perpetual fear. Under the cover of darkness, the gang torture, rape, kidnap, rob and maim anybody in the campus who dare cross their way. They cheat at examination openly and threaten lecturers. They were often with fire arms, daggers, axes and knives. In short, they are known as tin god and sacred cows of the campus. Eleje et al.[20] observed that cultism in our tertiary institutions have brought about riots, maiming, raping, rival, robbery, looting and radical student bodies. The extent of their ugly trends needed to be further established and if not checked, may cast serious doubts on the future role of our universities. Alumona and Amusan[21] noted that at least one hundred students in higher institutions in Nigeria were killed in cult-related incident in the year 2006 alone. Undie[22] stated that cult clashes led to the incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent and guilty students and hospitalization of students thereby suspending learning for some period of time. In addition to the physical damage and disruption of the learning process, life on university campuses where cultist activities prevail can be very unpleasant and insecure for those who are not directly involved with them. Ogunbameru[23] noted that the feeling of insecurity and fear of cultism were high in Nigeria tertiary education campuses. One worrying development is that the activities of cults in institutions of higher learning are now influencing groups in other institutions including secondary schools. Busa[24] noted that cultism is of particular interest, because it touched on one of the most frequently mentioned problems in the education section that day. The author pointed out that, indiscipline in schools is central to the factors which are attributes of the fast dwindling, declining and deteriorating standards. The various acts of indiscipline commonly perpetrated by acts such as truancy, stealing, hooliganism, examination malpractice, sexual immorality, and cultism among others are all distinctive to the educational system.

Theoretical Framework

Frustration-aggression theory and Social conflict theory serves as the theoretical framework. The main reason for adopting these theories is because it captures best the topic of the study. An observation of Nigerian society, particularly of the dying decades of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st century shows that the Nigeria is pervaded with frustrating events and frustrating circumstances, one in which it could be said that frustration is endemic. Since the 1980s, oppression and injustice have been rife, poverty has spread like wild fire, and frustration of the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of citizens, including the children and the youth, has been a cardinal features of our decadent society[25]. One result of widespread and sever frustration of the legitimate needs and aspiration of the masses of Nigerians has been the development in the personalities of ordinary Nigerians of varying degrees of hostile and destructive traits, which manifest, in certain cases, criminal behavior, cult membership and sometimes, crises orchestrated by frustrated youths in our societies. Thus, it may defensibly be asserted that a common denominator shared by the phenomenon of cultism, crime and crises in our societies is the existence of hostile and destructive urges in criminals, secret cult members and ring leaders of violent crises in our societies. As we have seen, this personality trait, characterized by hostility, and destructiveness, can be traced back to early experiences of frustration, and such experiences come from the environment. It is also interesting to note that, the specific events that trigger violent crises in our societies are usually the particular environment of a given society, and can often be seen to involve the frustration or denial of some basic needs. Whereas the basic thrust of conflict is that, society is made up of groups with competing and opposing values and interests, and that the most absolute represents the interest and values of the groups with the most absolute power. Group with power according to conflict theorists, makes things happen and cult groups would wish to preserve such power and keep the powerless at disadvantage. So the law has its origin in the interests of the few[26]. It is, therefore, logical that the labeling of a person as criminal (cultist) and the definition of certain act of conducts and misconducts at any given time and place clearly mirror the social system's power relations; it is also subjected to change as other interest gain power and alert the status quo. The Marxian view of social conflict helps us to understand that the rise of capitalist influence in the global economy, led to students being described as radicals to be silenced by the state[27]. Education became commercialised, government in keeping with International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommendations, opted for decreased funding of public utilities including the educational sector. It is about the allocation of limited resources by the state in its bid to govern. It is about the ideology that informs the manner of resource production and distribution of scarce values as it concerns the state and the individuals. The Nigerian government has been criticised on her approach to common good out of reasons like: inept leadership[28]; executive corruption, identity politics, conflict suppression as opposed to politics of

mutual inclusion in matters of state policy and direction[29]. The manifest reasons associated with student's unrest in the country showcase how the students define their objective conditions of schooling as Nigerians. This study however look at how this approach of frustration-aggression and social conflict theories, has influenced the involvement of students in cultism.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design, Study Frame and Sample Size

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Mathers, Fox and Hunn[30] contended that cross-sectional tries to get an overview of all the subjects, a total perception of the situation of things at a given point time using interview, questionnaire and other related methods. This design is considered appropriate for this study because; it has the capacity to adequately and accurately gather data from a sample in order to generalize the findings to the entire population. Furthermore, the design is economical and will provide the needed data for this study within a limited time frame. The study was carried out in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). It is located at Agbani, in the serene town of Enugu in the Eastern part of Nigeria and was founded as (ASUTECH) on July 30, 1980. It is also the first ever state owned university in Nigeria. It has the permanent site at Agbani in Nkanu West Local Government and a temporary site housing the Faculty of Engineering at Enugu town. The researchers choice of ESUT as the area of study was informed by the prevalence of cult-related activities in the area. ESUT has nine (9) Faculties; Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resources Management, Faculty of Applied Natural Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Social Sciences. The general population of the study was 50,000 as at 2017 academic year as gotten by the Registrar, from which a sample size of 397 was selected using Alien Taro Yamane (1967) for sample determination. For the in-depth interview, 6 respondents were interviewed. Thus, (3) anti-security groups in the school and 3 students from the selected departments. The researchers limitations of the study to ESUT was because of prevalence of cult-related activities.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, questionnaires were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20.0. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, frequency, tables were used for data analysis. The stated hypotheses were tested using chi-square (X^2) test of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Respondents' responses on perceived factors that give rise to cultism in ESUT

	Frequency	Percent
Peer influence	165	43.9
Need for brotherhood	63	16.8
Parental background	141	37.5
Uncertain	7	1.9
Total	376	100.0

Table 1 shows the level of perceived factors of respondents that give rise to cultism in ESUT. From the table, 165 (43.9%) of the respondents said peer influence were responsible, 63 (16.8%) said the need for brotherhood, 141 (37.5%) said parental background while 7 (1.9%) respondents were uncertain of the causes of cultism in ESUT. Findings indicate that peer influence and parental background are the major causes of cultism in ESUT. Also, the table further shows that the need for brotherhood is also responsible in the area.

Table 2: Respondents' responses on how frequently students hear about cult-related activities in ESUT

	Frequency	Percent
Once a week	68	18.1
Twice a week	111	29.5
Sparingly	190	50.5
Don't know	7	1.9
Total	376	100.0

Table 2 above shows the students perception level of awareness of cult-related activities. From the table, 68 (18.1%) respondents hear about it once a week, 111 (29.5%) twice a week and 190 (50.5%) sparingly while 7 (1.9%) don't know of its occurrence in ESUT. The findings indicate that 190 (50.5%) of the students are more aware about cult-related activities while as low as 68 (18.1%) have a contrary view.

In reaffirming these findings, an In-depth interview (IDI) respondents:

As you can see for yourself, I don't think any students would say he/ she is not aware of how often these big boys parade and execute their plans. Every student keeps hearing of their activities. The ESUT authority on the other hand, are never tired of sensitizing and educating students most especially the new intakes. (Male, 27 years, finalist).

Another IDI interviewee further said:

It is always broadcast, place on billboards, posters printed and even the guidance and counseling department educating us. I feel for those who do not know their mission before entering school. I pray God to help us understand our primary purpose here. That is all I have to say. (Female, 23 years, third year student).

Table 3

	Frequency	Percent
Male engagement	355	94.4
Female engagement	14	3.7
Uncertain	7	1.9
Total	376	100.0

Result from the above table, analysis reveals that 355 (94.4%) of respondents were male and 14 (3.7%) of respondents were female while other respondents were uncertain. The findings indicate that male students were more engaged in cult-related activities than their female counterparts.

Table 4: Respondents' responses on the distribution of respondent's perceived effectiveness between formal and informal methods of curbing cultism

	Frequency	Percent
Formal Methods	245	65.2
Informal methods	104	27.7
Uncertain	27	7.1
Total	376	100.0

Result from the above table, analysis shows that 245 (65.2%) of respondents perceive formal methods response as positive and 104 (27.7%) of respondents perceived their response as negative while 27 (7.1%) of respondents were uncertain of their effectiveness. However, findings show that formal and informal respondents differ in their responses. For instance, majority believe that formal methods are more likely to be effective than the informal in this study.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Male students are more likely to be aware of cult-related activities than their female counterparts.

Table 5: Chi-square Test of Significance

Variable	How often do you hear about cult-related activities				Total	Chi-Square (X ²)
	Once week	a	Once month	a	Sparingly	Uncertain
Sex						
Male	34(16.5%)		58(28.2%)		114(104.1%)	0(0%)
Female	34(20.0%)		53(31.2%)		76(44.7%)	7(4.1%)
Total	68(18.1%)		111(29.5%)		190(50.5%)	7(1.9%)
					376(100%)	

X² = 11.484
df = 3
p = .009

Result from the above analysis reveal a significant association (X² = 11.484; p = .009) that males are more aware of cult-related activities on campus than females and therefore supports the first hypothesis which states that male students are more likely to be aware of cult-related activities than their female counterparts.

Hypothesis 2: Respondents' with higher educational qualification have the tendency to condemn cult-related violence on campus

Table 6: Chi-square Table of Significance

Variable	Perception of Respondent's Tendency to Condemn Cultism		Total	Chi-Square (X ²)
	High Tendency	Low Tendency		
Sex				
NCE/OND	66(100%)	0(0%)	66(100%)	X ² = 26.684
SSCE/GCE (O'Level)	216(69.7%)	94(30.3%)	310(100%)	df = 1
Total	282(75.0%)	94(25.0%)	376(100%)	p = .000

Result from the above table shows there is a significant relationship (X² = 26.684; p = .000) between the respondents' educational qualification and their tendency to condemn cult-related violence on campus. The results go further to suggest that respondents with higher educational qualification(s) have higher tendencies (NCE/OND = 100%) to condemn cult-related activities than their counterparts with lower educational qualification(s) (SSCE/GCE i.e., O'Level = 69.7%).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the analysis of data and consistent with findings in previous studies, cultism is a common phenomenon in Nigerian Universities. This is in line with the findings of Okwu[31], as at September 2003, 5,000 students and lecturers have died on Nigerian Campus as a result of cult-related violent clashes. The study discovered that perceived factors that give rise to cultism by undergraduate students and they include: influence of peer group, parental background, societal decadence, erosion of education standards, lack of religious training, the need for brotherhood and the need for protection against the advantaged students. This is in line with the opinion of Rageliene[32] posited that, the period of adolescent is marked by social relationship in any environment he/she finds himself. At adolescent, there is a shift of emphasis on social relationship from the parents to the peer group. As adolescent breaks the total reliance and contact with his/her parents, he/she shifts same to the newly acquired group. This study also corroborates with what Ahedo et al.[33] that, parental background, lack of moral instruction at home and the manner in which the child is brought could be a factor in enrolment as a member of a cult. Furthermore, the study also identified different major problems to be associated with cult-related activities in Nigerian universities which includes; reduction of quality and quantity of education, suspension of academic learning, expulsion from school, riots, robbery, intimidation, harassment, death and disruption of examination and examination malpractice. This agrees with the findings of Ajayi et al.[8, 34], Mwuese. A case study conducted by Gideon[35] 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. These findings are in tandem with the findings of the study. It was discovered that cultism by undergraduate students were more frequently at ($p = .009$). The findings agrees with the hypothesis that more male students are more likely to be aware of cult-related activities than their female counterparts. The result shows that there is a significant association between respondents' gender and their level of awareness of cult-related activities. Hypothesis two states that there will be a significant relationship between respondents' educational qualification and their tendency to condemn cult-related violence on campus. There is a significant relationship between the respondents' educational qualification and their tendency to condemn cult-related violence on campus. This also in good fate confirms the suggestion of the second hypothesis. The results go further to suggest that respondents with higher educational qualification(s) have higher tendencies (NCE/OND = 100%) to condemn cult related activities than their counterparts with lower educational qualification(s) (SSCE/GCE i.e., O'Level = 69.7%).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on cultism as one the challenging problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This study has however yielded various important findings indicating that, there is need for government to provide a better approach in fighting cultism among students. The findings of this research is a pathway for policies and future researchers. This present study becomes a basis for making comparative analysis between the institution being studied and other institutions. It will also help the Federal Government to appraise their attitude and reactions to incidents of campus cultism in tertiary institutions. The findings has also added to our understanding of the causes, awareness, forms and problems therein. The study recommended that. Government should formulate and implement educational policies that are more proactive and stringently enforced in fighting cultism. The guidance and counseling department of the institution should strategize on a new sensitization mechanism that will penetrate and unlock the hearts of those who has the potential to become a cultist. The university authorities should beef up the security department and equip them with modern/sophisticated tools and also uphold the truth and be more sincere when handling campus cult issues. The government and bodies like non-government organization (NGO's), students and lectures can integrate in fighting cultism. This will help to establish a firm and cordial relationship among them in order to minimize social and emotional arising from frictions and bickering in order to jointly attack this common problem. It is recommended that expulsion, withdrawal and rustication will continue to be effected in nearly all institutions of higher learning as long as cult members are detected and arraigned before a disciplinary panel. The school authority should ensure that unqualified students are not granted entry since they cannot withstand the academic challenges involved.

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