

Addressing the Causes of Cultism in Nigerian Universities: A Case for the Application of Behavioural-Change Communication Strategies

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Abstract— Cultism is a serious issue of concern as it has seriously degraded the academic system in Nigerian Universities. In recent times, the activities of secret cult members in Nigeria tertiary institutions have assumed different negative dimensions. Understanding the root causes of cultism is of importance as a means of finding a lasting solution to it. This study empirically assessed the causes of cultism while making case for the use of behavioural-change communication strategies for curbing cultism in universities of South-East Nigeria. One federal university and a State-owned university: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and Enugu State university of Science and technology (ESUT) were used as a representative case study. Survey instruments used include questionnaire, focus group discussions, interviews and opinion survey. About 375 questionnaire was purposively administered to repented cultist. Using percentage mean score, the result revealed that negative influence of peer group as the first component factor that lead to cultism in the university community. Other identified factors include poor family background, harsh economic situation which arises from corruption and resulted to high level of poverty in the country, among others. This study recommends the use of behavioural-change communication strategies for addressing the identified causes of cultism in Nigerian universities.

Index Terms— Cultism, Causes, University Community, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most worrisome and embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the menace and aggressiveness of cult members and cult related activities worsening the security problems of the country. The potential for destruction of lives and property on campuses has not been a major concern to university administrators. Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) noted that there is hardly any academic session devoid of reported cult cases in most Nigerian university community and the violent activities of cultist are negatively affecting the achievement of the three fundamental objectives of Nigerian tertiary institutions which are research, teaching, and community service (Gboyega 2005). Ige (2014) observed that student unrest and cultism plague Nigerian higher educational institutions and turned them into dens of crises. It is so unfortunate that the initial

purpose of the founders of cultism was defeated ages ago and has resulted into national crises in the university. Prof. Wole Soyinka, and a group of six friends formed the Pirates Confraternity Elite in 1952 at University College Ibadan then part of the University of London. It was formed with a good intension and aim of producing future Nigeria leaders who should be very proud of their Africa heritage. It was meant to sight non- violently but intellectual 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 elitism. Azotani (2006) revealed that it was used to demonstrate resentment to colonialism, and colonial way of life; to fight against social ills and the conformist degradations within and outside the university community, to abolish conventions and promote institutional chivalry without any violence. leadership tussle and misunderstanding engulfed the Pyrates confraternity and in 1980s cultism in the university community split in pirates confraternity and spread over the 300 institutions of higher education in the country with various names and logo among them are; The Brotherhood of the Blood [also known as Two-Two (Black Beret) another notorious confraternity was founded at Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Pyrates Confraternity derailed and suddenly, the universities found themselves awash in an orchestrated orgy of violence, unfortunately perpetrated by such students on campus lead to the emergence of other cult groups in Nigerian university community. Akor (1994) noted that one of the earliest reported case of secret cult violence happened in 1985 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, when a non-cult student snatched the girlfriend of another student, who was a cult leader. Some of the most prominent of these cults are the Black axe, Vikings, Amazons, Eiyee confraternity, Buccaneer, Dragons and Mafia. The cult for the female students includes Temple of Eden, Barracudas, Frigates, Black Bra, and Daughters of Jezebel, and so on. (Adewale 2005, *c.f.* Ekundayo and Osalusi, 2010).

Several efforts have been made to curb cultism but to no avail. In 1984, Prof Wole Soyinka, notice that cultism has derailed from its intention, he extricated himself from emerging trend, initiated the abolition of the pirates confraternity in all tertiary institution. The 1979 and 1999 Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are abhorrent to any association, club, society and groups whose activities run counter-productive to national development. Arijesuyo and Olusanya, (2011) as cited in Medaiyanose (2016) maintained that despite the Decree 47 of 1989 which provides for a five-year jail term for anyone belonging to campus cults, cultism continues to assume a major social menace and a serious obstacle to peace and harmony in the university community in Nigeria. Some university authorities

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through administrative panels of inquiries have suspended or rusticated some students for participation in cult-related activities and violence, but it did not result to any positive change rather cults have waxed stronger and the international image of the country and the corporate image of Nigerian universities are seriously tarnished by the ugly incidence. The problem has heightened the drive for parents who can afford in sending their children abroad for further studies, which contributes to a drain on the country's foreign exchange reserves. This cankerworm of cultism in the university community must not be allowed to continue hence the need for this study. The study objective is therefore to examine the root causes of cultism as this will be a stepping stone to the discovering of the behavioural change communication strategies for curbing cultism in the university community. The research provides an empirical knowledge of the root causes of cultism in the university community. This will also provide a basis for researchers and stakeholders in the education system to investigate the behavioural change communication change strategies for curbing cultism in the university community. It will also serve as reference material for future researchers.

II. CONCEPTUALIZING CULTISM

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) defined cultism as a small group or religious activities whose beliefs are typically secrete, esoteric and individualistic. Lexican Webster's Dictionary defines secret cult as a group of people who share a common cause and whose mode of meetings and agenda are unknown to the public and where initiation into rank and file is usually done in secret. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2000) defined "cultism" as a group of people believing in a particular system of religious worship with the special customs and ceremonies, worship of or loyalty to a person, principle or idea. Ogunbameru (2004) defined secret cult as any form of organization whose activities are 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. In summary cultism can be seen as a secret society or association with ritual practice whose activities is inhuman, illegal and illegitimate against the society norms, values and aspirations. Members are bound with an oaths, fear is inculcated into the members not to reveal their secret as the initiation formalities, admission policy and mode of operation are done in secret and kept secret. Cultism is a dangerous venture that affects not just the society but can easily rule the life of its members. It so unfortunate that cultism has spread beyond university community to secondary schools and even to the wider community.

The socialization theory is used as the theoretical framework for the study analysis. Socialization theory is the process through which cultural values, norms; behaviors and skills characteristics of a society are transmitted to its young and potential members and it is an essential means of preserving cultural heritage and achieves basic social conformity. Socialization involves learning by imitation and observation (Eguavoen 2006), and it is the most rapid form of learning by students, as supported by Bandura's theory,

(Eguavoen 2006). The school is an agent of socialization that has both formal and informal aspects with a strong capacity to influence a child or students positively or negatively. The peer group as an unavoidable and rapid means of socialization could be beneficial or dysfunctional as this means is one of the most debated means of cultism influence in the university community. Students learn faster through peer group, spend more time and rap our easily with peer group than even their parents or any class of people. Peer group could be a strong channel of influence as bad company corrupt good manners I Corinthians 13:55 (KJV).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mediayanose (2016) attributed the causes and sustenance of cultism in the university community to moral decadence, the learning environment, and poor educational administration and management. Owoeye (1997) established strong links between a weak and defective family background and influence as tendencies for students to join secret cults. In such cases, parents themselves may be members of secret cults or they may be the cause of child abuse and neglect. Most families fails in their major function of providing solid moral foundation for the children especially those children from broken homes may not have the privilege to be inculcated the right attitude and social values of society. Rafiu (1993) suggest corruption in the society and the inability of the modern family to equip children with effective socialization needed to conform to acceptable cultural norms as the cause of cultism while Alanamul et.al. (2010) revealed that those students who indulge in cult activities are not persecuted and this could be a serious motivation for others to join cultism. Strategies employed to exterminate cultism in some universities such as suspension and dismissal of cultist, arrested and prosecuted, inscriptions on the billboard, did not impacted any positively on the attitudinal Change on the cultists as their evil activities still pervade in the university community (Amadi 2013). Non funding and provision of basic recreational facilities like games to make the university attractive so that youthful exuberances of students will find a rewarding outlet in competitive sports like football, athletics which could engage students in their spare times could be a serious issue of concern. Student or youth must find a way of exercising youthful exuberance, and not providing a good learning environment for learning could lure the student into cultism Omogun and Akanle (2007). Adewale (2005) revealed the need for the committee of Vice-Chancellor of the Nigerian universities to adopt a common and uniform approach to solving the problem of cultism and engaging the services of former cultists as universities staff must be looked into. Eneh (2008) revealed that cultism in the university community is serious matter as one of the causes could be attributed to hardship in the country which is induced by corruption and the result is high rate of poverty. In addition, the political utilizes their services for political vices. Though studies have been done on cultism in the university but Ogidefa (2008) discovered that cult group and cult related activities continue unabated. This study therefore, is a qualitative and a quantitative search on the root causes of cultism in the university community.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was employed for this study. The area of study is south east universities in Nigeria; one federal university and one State-owned university- the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), were used as representative case studies for other universities in Nigeria. The main reason for using UNN and ESUT as the study areas was because the former is the first indigenous university in Nigeria while the latter is the first state university of science and technology in Nigeria. Data was collected from both secondary and primary sources. The primary data was collected with the aid of structured questionnaire and focused group discussions, oral interview. Universities repented cultists form the sample population ad sample frame for the focus group discussion and questionnaire administration. About 375 repented cultists were identified and questionnaire was purposively administered to them during the focus group discussion at the four campuses of the universities through total sampling techniques due to the negligibility of the sample frame. Non-profit religious organization that rehabilitates cultist provided access to these repented cultists. The Section A of the questionnaire comprised of the bio and socio-economic data of the respondents while section B contained a four-point likert scale on the causes of cultism as extracted from literature. There was a 100% response rate from the questionnaire administered.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The biographic data from the respondents shows that 70% were male while 30% were female. The age distribution of the respondents < 20 are 30% of the respondents, 20-24 years are 23%, 24-28 years are 38% of the respondents and >28 years are 9% of the respondents.

The following were discovered as the root causes of cultism in the university community;

- i. Harsh economic situation arising from corruption and induced poverty in the country.
- ii. Affluence (fame, quest for power, money, status and protection)
- iii. Inadequate funding of the university to acceptably take care of student welfare
- iv. Moral decadence in the society
- v. Negative influence of peer group
- vi. erosion of education standards
- vii. family background and influence
- viii. Militarization of the Nigerian Polity (Political affiliation)
- xv. Non-prosecution of apprehended cultists

Table 1: Computation of the Response Measurement using Mean percentage

Causes of Cultism	1	2	3	4	%
Harsh economic situation arising from corruption and induced poverty in the country.	25	10	10	-	75%
Affluence (fame, quest for power, money, status and protection)	20	15	5	-	65%
Inadequate funding of the university to acceptably take care of student welfare.	10	10	4	-	52%

Moral decadence in the society	20	12	3	-	51%
Negative influence of peer group	30	20	5	-	95%
erosion of education standards	15	10	8	-	59%
family background and influence	35	10	7	-	72%
Militarization of the Nigerian Polity (Political affiliation)	25	11	4	-	59%
Students indulge in cultism because those caught in cult activities are not persecuted	10	15	10	-	70%

Source; Researcher’s field survey

A. DISCUSSIONS

Influence of Peer Group: Influence of peer group is like a wide fire and Students especially of adolescent age have more intense social relationship with their peers easily than any other category of persons. Social relationship shift sharply from the parents or guardian to the peer group at adolescent stage. Peer group is a serious agent of socialization and cultism exist as a result of socialization. Considering the present happen in country peer socialization is more dysfunctional than beneficial as majority of the cultist are lured into joining cultism by intimidation from their peer group while some join through deceit and some are convinced by peer group to join the cultism without the knowledge of its implications. Peer group influence is discovered as the first grade root casual factors of cultism in the university community.

Harsh economic situation in the country: This is another factor that has led some students into joining cultism. Harsh economic situation which arises from high rate of corruption and result to high rate of poverty in the country is a matter of concern. The school fees is consider high because of the rate of poverty in the society. Many of the students get into the university, find it difficult to copy because of school fees including accommodation fees because most of the live outside the campus. These students get frustrated and instead of dropping out of school resolve to join cultism as a means of survival in other to overcome the harsh economic condition of the country. Some students especially those from poor background in quest to break the bounds of poverty join cultism to make money through various dubious acts of cult activities.

Affluence: This is a contributing factor to the causes of cultism in school. Student join cultism just for fame, quest for power, money, status and protection. This is because of the value system of the society. The system values affluence without due consideration to the means. So, some student just feel like joining cultism to make a name, to be feared, and respected within and outside the school community.

Inadequate funding of the university to acceptably take care of student welfare: This has been a problem for ages. Negligence on the part of the government to providing a good and inviting learning environment, by funding the university and provision of basic facilities for learning and recreational facilities in the university has contributed to the causes of cultism. Students at this adolescence stage needs some refreshing and recreational activities and entrepreneur skills within the school environment to keep them busy and refresh outside their normal routine study.

Moral decadence in the society: The society is characterized with immoral values and this has been inculcated in the lives of the youth. The society as a result of corruption has provided an enabling environment for all forms of crimes which is the problem of cultism in the university community. Also, the state of normlessness and value in the country is connected to students' joining cultism the society ought to provide all the educational and institutional arrangement to enhance the autonomous moral development in the life of the student instead expose the student to normlessness culture and all sorts of cruelty including the menace of being entangle with cultism. Corruption and all sorts of vices has become the issue of the day and the repercussion is the strike of cultism in the university community.

Erosion of education standards: The state of corruption in the country has equally eroded the educational standard, University community is a higher institution of learning and a secondary agent of socialization where moral should be highly inculcated in the life of the student but reverse is the case. Moral has to do with teaching the student on what is right or wrong in human conduct or objectivity can be achieved mainly by practice and not just by oral expression. The school administration has failed in their responsibility of inculcating moral in the life of these students through their immoral actions or dealings in some certain facets of school administration. Students gained admission into the universities with fake results that cannot be defended, while admission into certain undergraduate courses attracts a huge fee and some gained admission as a result of political affluence. Some of these students find solace in cultism in order to survive the academic rigors at all cost. These students intimidate lecturers and the school authorities and other students to do some of their academic works. Lecturer who are cultist and immoral equally engage or intimidate students to join cultism while some decide to join cultism in other to deal with some heartless lecturers who's life style is to intimidate and take undue advantage towards students.

Militarization of the Nigerian Polity (Political influence): the political situation of the society which is characterized with corruption, poverty, violence, political and communal clashes, is a contributing factor to students joining cultism in the universities. Some of the harden and ambiguous politicians engages the services of cult members for political rival against their opponent, manipulate the electoral process and even assassinate, and then receive a huge financial package, job opportunity and even political appointment as a means of compensation. This unhealthy act of the nation encourages student joining cultism in the university.

Family background and Influence: Family is the earliest or first agent of socialization. Family has an indefatigable influence in the life of any child or student. Most family fails in its function to provide a solid moral foundation for children. Broken homes can lead students to cultism, students whose parents are separated, trained in the environment of violence and hate, lack parental care and love, get frustrated and unfortunate find solace in the hands of peer group and political fathers who lured them into joining cultism. Some students however has an inborn trait of being cultist, while parents that are in secret cult also influence their children to be cultist. As it is said like father like son.

Non prosecution of cultist: Majority of the students caught in cult activities are not persecuted. This encourages some students to become cultist. Students join cultism because there must be a way out even when they are cut. That is to show that they have a backing. The law is there but not functional. In Nigeria, everything is possible as long as you have a political god father. This is as a result of the corrupt nature of the society.

These causes of cultism can be best addressed through the use of various behavioural change strategies because they cannot be completely eradicated. For example, peer influence cannot be stopped but the behavior of those involved can be changed to accept the positive influence and reject the negative ones. These behavioural changes strategies entail the application of interactive processes in the development of good moral standards that is capable of outliving their circumstances. This involves motivating and exposing the inherent dangers of cultism to the young generation with a view to change their perception and implanting strong resistance to such vice in all circumstance. Once an individual becomes matures, the use of rules and regulations without change of mind to bring desired behavior becomes difficult. Thus, behavioural change strategies will do well through communication and understanding of the dangers of cultism and the motivation to live above such vices.

VI. CONCLUSION

Cultism is a dangerous game. It is a threat to life and has sent many of the young stars to their early grave with indelible pain in the lives of their parents, loved ones, and society at large. It has equally degraded the educational system of the nation and kept the university community unsafe and unhealthy for learning. It is so unfortunate that cultism in the university community is spreading like a canker worm and the escalating rate appears unchecked as campus cults have become heartless and callous that students and teachers no longer feel safe to pursue learning under an ideal university environment. This study however have qualitative and quantitatively discovered the root causes of cultism in the university community. The knowledge of the root cause of any challenges is a stepping stone to the discovering of its solutions. This study is therefore a guide to the search for behavioural change communication strategies for curbing student cultism in the university community. Thus, when the appropriate behavioural-change is applied to each cause, the cultist can be motivated and encouraged to shun cultism and embrace a better way of life. This study can be extended by examining the appropriate the behavioural change communication strategies for each cause of cultism, so that appropriate authorities can apply same in curbing cultism in Nigerian university communities.

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