

TRENDS IN CAMPUS CULTISM: AN IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

A critical view of Nigeria as a nation shows that there are several social vices challenging the peaceful existence of the nation in recent times. No facet of the society is left out. The situation in Nigeria tertiary institutions is very worrisome to the students, lecturers, other members of staff and the various school leaderships, and even the society since the school is a microcosm of the larger society. The government is also getting panic of the situation. Tertiary institutions according to law establishing them are supposed to be a tranquil environment for learning and carrying out researches and other academic works, but this could no longer be guaranteed as a result of the menace of cultism and other social vices. It is on this note that this paper succinctly examined some of the known cult groups and their mode of initiations, some of the recent activities of cultism in the tertiary institutions, the effect of these cult activities on the smooth running of educational programmes in tertiary institutions, the reason for cultism on campuses and the sustainability of quality education in the midst of these cult activities. Finally some concrete suggestions that could help wipe out cultism and sustain quality education in the years ahead in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria were given.

Key words: Cultism, Sustainable, Quality Education and Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

One of the concern areas in the education industry today especially in our institutions of higher learning is to eradicate or curb social vices that have bedeviled the system and possibly propagate the right values in students in order to sustain quality education that could create a better society now and in the future. Cultism in campuses of higher institution of learning is one of the social problems that the government is finding it tough to eliminate due to its faceless nature. Social problem according to Henslin (2010) is one of the conditions of the society that have negative effects on large number of people.

Akpochafo (2010) defined social problem as a social condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable that something needs to be done through collective action. Based on these definitions, one is right to conclude that cultism in higher institution campuses is a social problem or social vice since the unrelenting activities of secret cults have caused severe havoc on the lives and psyche of Nigerians.

Cultism is devotion to the doctrine or a cult or to the practices of a cult. Cultism is a religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader (Dictionary of English Language, 2016). According to Uwanda (2016) cultism is also seen as any organization that is kept away from the public whose activities can cause threats and dangers to the peace of the community. Ajuwon and Adeola (2005) referred to cultism as a faceless organization of students and others on campuses with the sole objective of terrorizing, molesting others, destabilizing the campuses, stealing and gaining undue advantages for their selfish motives.

Ernest (2015) observed that cultism is a major challenge ravaging tertiary institutions today. It is most rampant on campuses these days as a result of oppression of non-cultists by cultists. The crave for power and popularity by students, pressure from peer groups and the need to feel secured. Secret cult has been defined as any

association of men and women with common interest, and whose activities are not known to non-members. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2018 Edition) of current learning defines cult as a system of religious worship especially one that is expressed in ritual. Secret cult and cultism means the same thing and can be used interchangeably. Members of cultism are called cultists. They commit themselves to oath and allegiance which serve as their strong bond.

However, the emphasis of this paper on campus cultism is not that campus cultism should be discouraged and the street or outside school cultism should be encouraged. Whether their activities are in the campus or street, they are all evil and should be shunned. Most times, the evil activities of these groups begin in campuses and end in the streets and vice versa.

From the origin of cultism in Nigeria, campus cultism is as old as university education in Nigeria. The first university in Nigeria, university of Ibadan was established in 1948. Four years after (1952), the first known secret cult organization, the Pyrate Confraternity (seadogs) was founded by Wole Soyinka (now Professor Soyinka) and six other colleagues. Ajayi, Haastrup and Osalusi (2017) pointed out thus; the origin of cultism was traced to the seadog confraternity (a.k.a. Pyrates), founded by Wole Soyinka and six others at the foremost University of Ibadan in 1952. The peaceful and non-violent confraternity set up then in the 1980s metamorphosed into a secret cult whose activities have been characterized by some bizarre and violent activities.

The peaceful and non-violent confraternity set up then was inspired by the need to redress the injustice being meted on Nigerians by the colonial masters who were then at the helm of the affairs in the university and the nation at large. Taking a look at the lofty idea of the first cult group in the university (fighting tyranny and oppression), one may be tempted to ask why then the recent cult groups on campuses are very cruel and full of violence. Instead of fighting for peace, tranquility, and eliminate school vices, they now breeds violent, oppression, terror, stealing, killings and destructions of properties. Cultism culminated itself into a social vice on campuses of learning. What then is the future of the education system in Nigeria? How do we sustain quality education in this atmosphere of fear and chaos? What are the proactive steps to be taken to curb this menace? What is the position of the government towards this

vice? It is based on all these questions and other related issues that this paper seek to address.

Some known cult groups in campuses

For over 13 years, the Pyrates were the only confraternity on Nigeria University Campuses. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was cult explosion in and outside the university campuses in Nigeria. This was as a result of disagreement within existing cult groups and the renouncement of cultism by some university students as a result of the amnesty granted to all renounced cultist by the government of president Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. Oguntuase (2007) and Kpanban, (2017) maintained that while schism within cult groups gave birth to proliferation of other cult groups in campuses, renouncement of cultism by some students gave birth to multiple cult groups outside the campuses.

Some of these cult groups as mentioned by some writers who have written about cultism include:

The male groups

1. The pyrate confraternity (Seadogs), founded in 1952 by Wole Soyinka and a group of six friends at the University college, Ibadan to advocate against the discrimination and oppression of poor and disadvantaged members of the society. This was the first cult group in the campus and was known to be non-violent
2. The supreme Eiye confraternity (Air Lords) was formed in the University of Ibadan in 1965.
3. Buccaneers confraternity (SeaLords or Ban) was formed in 1972 at the University of Benin.
4. The Neo-Black movement of Africa (Black Axe) was founded in 1983 in the University of Benin.
5. The Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion of Consortium (the Klansmen Konfraternity KKK) was also formed in 1983 in the University of Calabar.
6. The Supreme Vikings Confraternity (the adventurers or De Norsemen club of Nigeria) emerged in 1984 at the University of Calabar.

7. The Family Confraternity (the campus mafia or the mafia) which modeled itself after the Italian Mafia emerged. Shortly after their arrival, several students were expelled from Abia state University for cheating and "Cultism".
8. The Brotherhood of the Blood (Black Beret) was founded at Enugu State University of Science and Technology.
9. The Victor Charlie Boys was established by Augustine Ahiazu when he was the vice chancellor of the River State University of Science and Technology.

Other cults founded in the 1990s includes Second Son of Satan (SSS), Night Cadet, Sonmen, MbaMba Brothers, Temple of Eden, Trojan Horse, the Jurist, White Bishops, Gentlemen Clubs, Fame, Executioners, Dreaded Friends of Friends, Eagle Club, Black Scorpion, Red Sea Horse, Fraternity of Friends, Black Panthers, White Angels, Termites, Black Cat and Vampires etc (Inyang, 2017; Ogbu, 2001).

Female cult groups

In the late 1990s the female cult groups began to emerge. Among them are; Daughters of Jezebels, the Black Brazier, The Amazons, the Viqueens, the Damsel, Daughters of Doom, Comic Queens, Pink Ladies, Orange girls or Pottage and Girls Queen Beret. These female confraternities have supplied spies for allied male confraternities as well acting as prostitution syndicates (Inyang, 2017, Wikipedia, 2018).

Looking at the various cult groups one will envisage that their activities are numerous and dangerous as well as detrimental to the teaching and learning in the university campuses. Inyang (2017) stated that, the activities of these groups take various destructive forms which include: torture, advanced fee fraud, making painful inscriptions on the bodies of new members, voodoo ritual practice, murder, drinking human blood and urine, taking of hard drugs, holding meetings in unconventional places such as cemeteries, forests and river sides etc, indecent dressing, intimidation of others, armed robbery, sexual assault and kidnapping.

Causes of cultism in campuses of learning

The causes of cultism in campuses can be traced to many factors either within or outside the student environment. However, the activities of

cultism are similar in all the campuses. In spite of the dangerous nature of this organization that endanger their own lives and people around them, students still willingly apply to join such groups. Some of these significant factors include the following:

Influence of peer group: often young people join these groups through their peers. Friends' beliefs have a strong influence on students world view.

Popularity and recognition: many students want to create the image of a big boy or girl who commands things to happen on campuses.

Protection in campus: if a student is intimidated by a cult member, he/she may decide to join the rival group to have protection from his/her own group without noticing that protection cannot be given by any cult group but rather makes them vulnerable and threatens their lives.

Apart from the above mentioned ones, others include parental background, societal decadence, bad habit, erosion of educational standard, loneliness, desire for brotherhood, quest for power. The social set up of the society contribute to the strengthening of cultism, as in the economic, social, religious and political stratifications characterize the social set up of some societies, the virtue of man is judged by the class he/she belongs to. All these among others breed ground for cultism to flourish in various campuses. Ajayi, et al (2017) summarized that the major causes of cultism in tertiary institutions were influence of peer group; parental background; societal decadence; erosion of education standard; militarization of the Nigerian polity; lack of recreational facilities; quest for power and protection among others.

Uwandu (2016) summarized the causes thus: frustration, desire for vengeance, poor accommodation, lack of recreational facilities like football pitches and other sports facilities. Schools that lack a strong security system is highly vulnerable to infiltration and activities of cult groups, oppression from lecturer, poor institution management. Ajuwon and Adeola (2006) maintained that the major causes of cultism on campuses are the influence of peer group cum adolescence, the need for freedom, the scientific revolution on electronic media, greed and abuse of power in the society and economic, social, religious and political stratifications set up of the society. After looking at the causes, one may be tempted to ask, what are the causes of violence in or among cult groups in campuses of learning? The answer is

not far fetched because it depends on their mode of operations. Much of the violence witnessed are traceable to some of the cult groups like Eiye confraternity, the Black axe, the Vikings and Mafia as they are called.

The most common cause of violence among them is supremacy. They fight for who is stronger or come first in every campus they exist. Control and domination become major drives of violence. Each group sees the academic institution or community as private kingdoms to preside over at any given time. The emergence of different cult groups on campuses led to the introduction of violence as a key component of cult activities. Right from the time of initiation, violence is the all encapsulating factor of cult activities. Before now conflicts used to exist in campuses, but were traditionally settled at the level of healthy academic competitions, intelligence and scholarship. This is no longer the case as various cult groups now have no regard for the sanctity of life, they maimed and killed any moment in the name of resolving conflicts among themselves.

To conclude on this issue of violence, one may say that some of the cult leaderships lost control of their membership as they carried out unstrained recruitment of new members in large members (up to 500-1000 members) in a session, so some could no longer be controlled by their leadership after initiation, and so they operate arbitrary without receiving any command.

Effects of cult activities on the operation of the school system

The havoc caused by cult activities on campuses is very alarming in terms of human and other resources lost. Imaguazegie (1999) remarked that of all factors militating against smooth academic calendar, secret cult activities and indulgence in hard drugs appear the most intractable today. The wanton destruction of lives and property carried out by members of secret cult and drug addicts have become very worrisome in and outside university campuses.

Academic activities have suffered a lot as a result of these cult activities. Campuses have become war front where reckless use of offensive weapons including arms and ammunitions by cult members is the order of the day. This seriously portends a grave danger for the growth of sound education in Nigeria. Students now live and study in fear in campuses. Lar (2005) points out that the activities of cult members have led to so much loss of life and property especially in our institutions of

learning; students kill and injure themselves during intra cult clashes on revenge missions, valuables like cars and houses are burnt down, electronics, provisions in shops among others are looted.

Cultism has nothing positive to contribute to education in Nigeria. All their operations are counter-productive to the practice and principles of Nigerian educational system, so if the activities of cultism are not averted, what will be the faith of having quality education in Nigeria in the near future? Cult activities in their violence form had continue to disrupt the smooth running of school calendars. A peaceful conduct of seasonal examinations and tranquil environment for academic activities could no longer be guaranteed. Lecturers find it difficult to discharge their duties effectively, otherwise they lose their lives to cultism. Lecturers as well as the management of tertiary institutions have been stark by this act of anti-social activities all in the guise of cultism. Ajayi et al (2017) put forward that, some of the effects of cultism include loss of lives and properties, disruption of academic activities on campuses, unsafe University environment.

Ernest (2015) pointed out that students in the campuses die very young because they are involved in some criminal acts like in the case of four students of the University of Port Harcourt killed in Aluu community in Port Harcourt city. They were beaten and burnt to death because people believed they were cultists and one among them was seen with a harmful weapon. Cult activities have led to the mutilation and even killing of students. It sometimes leads to expulsion of both the guilty and innocent students, thereby reducing the number of graduates from tertiary institutions. Furthermore, cult related activities or violence has led to the loss of school property that are mostly used for teaching and learning. This hampers learning, while damaged infrastructure will require another much resources to replace them. Money meant for important projects will be eventually used to re-purchase what the institution already has thus amounting to colossal waste. Ernest (2015). In a nutshell, cult activities disrupt academic activities on campuses since they make campuses unsafe for learning and this result in the fall in education standard in Nigeria.

Sustaining quality education in the midst of cultism on campuses

Generally, one may say that all the stakeholders in education sector are to ensure the sustainability of quality education in Nigeria

especially in institutions of higher learning, but with the situation of cult activities x-rayed in this paper, the government takes the major burden of the task because it is the most equipped body among others. The government by implication is the policy maker, enforcing and supervisory agents. Since cultism in campuses has become an epidemic, it will require enough funds and strong policies to handle the situation, so government will take the lead and then other stake holders will support or give complimentary assistance to sustain the system. This apart, education in Nigeria is a capital intensive project, and then think of the epidemic of cultism that has eaten deep into the marrow of the sector (campuses of tertiary institutions in focus).

In the first instance, the government must have the political will to wipe out cultism from campuses, even though some of the cult groups belong to the government in which politicians engage the services of these cultists as political thugs, body guards, hired assassins. The government should remember that its' primary function is to secure the rights of citizens and provide social amenities for them which education is one of them (Oguntuase, 2017). For quality education to be sustained there must be a safe environment for teaching and learning. Though government has invested much to ensure quality and standard education, but it has not invested enough in terms of policies and funds to fight cultism. The serious attempt to do this was in 1999 during the Obasanjo tenure as president. It was in this year that five students of Obafemi Awolowo University were cruelly massacred in cult-related violence. The vice chancellor of the school was sacked and other vice chancellors, rectors and provosts from other tertiary institution were summoned to Abuja and were given the mandate to eradicate cultism from their campuses under three months (Oguntuase, 2017). Proactive steps were taken that time to eradicate cultism. Some positive results were yielded. Some cult members denounced their membership of secret cults. Others were expelled from school and others left on their own. But after few years later, cultism in campuses re-surfaced and in more deadly forms. Today, cultism in campuses is an endemic issue that is threatening to collapse academic activities in most of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

However, government and all stakeholders in education should not fold their hands in the face of cultism. Trying to put a permanent solution to the activities of cultism in campuses will go a long

way to create a safe and conducive environment for learning in Nigeria. By doing this, standard and quality in education will be assured, and national development will be smooth since no nation can grow above the standard and quality of its educational system.

Suggestions

Based on the discussion, the following suggestions are put forward to curb the menace of cultism in the society.

1. Corruption should be eliminated from campuses by all cost because it causes some of the social vices on campuses.
2. Powers to handle top government offices should be given to visionary and selfless leaders who understand the importance of standard or quality education.
3. Anti-cult week should be two to three times a year in campuses and activities of such weeks should be intensified and geared towards discouraging cultism and promoting other social activities among students.
4. Government should send spies into various cult groups to study their mode of operations and dismantle or weaken their operational networks.
5. "Catch them young" approach should be used. By this government should introduce anti-cult content into Nursery/Primary school curriculum so that as they grow up they recognise and understand fully that cultism is evil and they cannot be lured into it by others.

Conclusion

The gravity of violence in our campuses whenever there are intra or inter- rival struggles or fights among cult groups reminds the government that a lot need to be done and urgently to bring this menace to an end in order to salvage the Educational Institutions. Learning cannot take place

effectively where these armed groups operate violently, destroying lives and properties, creating fear and panic on other students and the entire communities of learning. Therefore, all stakeholders in education must put hands on deck to improve the security apparatus of campuses and seriously enlighten students and would-be students on the need to free themselves from engaging in cultism as it has no benefit in life. Tertiary institutions are built for learning activities and not cult activities.

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