

INFLUENCE OF CULTISM ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF FEDERAL
POLYTECHNIC, OFFA, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Cultism in tertiary institutions is a social problem which seems to defy solution in Nigeria. The major objective of the study was to determine the influence of cultism on academic performance of students in Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study raised one research question. The survey research design was adopted and the sample of the study consisted of 240 respondents randomly selected among the staff of the institution. A structured questionnaire designed by the researcher was used to obtain the data. The data collected were analysed using percentage rating with benchmark of 70% for accepting the questionnaire items. The research revealed that cultism has negative influence on academic performance of students in Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study concluded that cultism is making the acquisition of skills that could accelerate the phase of Nigeria's development difficult. As a way out, the paper among other things recommended that new students should be adequately orientated on the menace of cultism.

Keywords: *Cultism, Academic performance, Students and Federal Polytechnic*

Introduction

All human societies have established norms which regulate the conducts of their members. This condition made the society to be composed of different kinds of people which include the conformists and the deviants. The former are the people who strictly adhere to the societal codes of behaviour, while the latter go contrary to the laws of the society. In the same vein, the society is made up of different social institutions. Some of these institutions operate openly within the provision of the law, while the activities of some of them are shrouded in secrecy. Notable among the secret associations is the secret cult. According to Ladole (2006), secret cults are associations that are kept absolutely hidden from the general public and members who violate their tenets are bound to face severe consequences. In the same vein, Mbah, Egwu and Emesini (2018) concluded that cultism is a ritual practice carried out by a group of people whose formalities for membership, admission, policy, initiation and modes of operation are kept in secret and their activities affect many people. Perhaps the most important reason for the secrecy of the groups are initiation and other activities which must be kept away from the outside world. In the same vein, Abioye (2011) asserts that 'secrecy' is the basic instrument of operation of the cult. The activities of the group are kept in secret as some of those activities are not honourable, especially when it comes to a situation where human being(s) could be used for sacrifice to appease the gods. Going by this trend, the members become more recognized and even feared.

Ayo (2013) reports that service to humanity is the most recognized reason for the modern secret cults. The members pose as a form of opposition against any kind of oppression (real and imaginary) at work, in schools or the community. In line with these, Josse (2012) points out that cult members are presumed to have overcome the fear of the future, having received divine strength through their exposures and are assured that they had shaken off failure in life. The author further states that the cult members believe that they are secured because they have undergone various preparatory excesses for security through which the activities of evil spirits have been neutralized. It is worthy of note that cult membership transcends age barrier. This implies that there is no age limit for membership of secret cults. In schools, members of secret cults organize against any form of intimidation from lecturers and other social groups in the system. According to Udoh and Ikezu (2015) and Mbah, Egwu and Emesini (2018), cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions started at The University College; Ibadan in 1952 when a group of seven young men headed by professor Wole Soyinka formed the National Association of Sea Dog (Pirate Confraternity). It was founded essentially for students to air their grievances to the discriminatory tendencies and imposition of British values on Nigerian students. It was also an avenue for calling oppressive lecturers and rascally oriented students to order. It is however worthy of note that cultism on Nigerian campuses has completely derailed from the objectives of the founding fathers. This because, it is now used as an instrument of coercion, disruption, mayhem and clashing over membership recruitment. In 2015 for example, two secret societies namely; "Eleye" and "Black Axe" engaged in midnight clash at the Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria, over recruitment of members. During the incident, dangerous weapons such as guns, cutlass, knives, cudgels and even chams were freely used. At the end of fracas, three students were killed, while several others sustained several injuries.

As put forward by Lamas (2015), many authors agree that academic performance is a result of learning. In the same vein, Okafor and Dalyopjah (2020) state that academic performance describes the outcome of an educational endeavour. According to Lamas (2015), academic performance lays emphasis on attainment of goals and objectives set in a programme attended by a student. To buttress this, Mamman and Oladeji (2018) state that it points at the extent of educational achievement which manifests an understanding, knowledge or idea. The authors also point out that academic performance is usually represented by grades. According to Kapur (2018), academic performance is influenced by a number of factors among which are; attitude of the students, school resources, schools and abilities of the teacher, classroom environment, social circle, psychological and health factors, visual and hearing impairments, counselling and guidance services, time management, home environment, teaching-learning method as well as approachability and professionalism. This shows that academic performance is influenced by social, psychological and motivational factors. From the foregoing, it could be seen that cultism could have negative impact on students' academic performance. This because, it could lead to closures of school, disruption of academic calendar and create fear which may affect the productivity of the teachers and concentration of the students towards the attainment of educational goals. It thus, based on these that this study focuses on influence of cultism on students' academic performance in Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Cultism has become a menace in our tertiary institutions. Thus, many students have, as a result of cultic activities died, expelled, rusticated or suspended from schools. Some also lost concentration on academic activities or threaten lecturers to pass examinations, while others become truant students. Cultism therefore, resulted to various degree of losses to homes, schools and the country as a whole. Although, it has been argued in various quarters that the main purpose of cultism is to protect oneself from intimidation by strong people. Jolayemi (2012) argued that no man can actually protect themselves if the hand of God is/against them. Adeoye (2012) also opines that the students who come to learn in higher institution need not to fear. This is however, not the case in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning. The problem of this study is thus, an empirical determination of the influence of cultism on the student's academic performance in Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to find out the influence of cultism on students' academic performance at Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Nigeria.

Research Question

What are the effects of campus cultist activities on students' academic performance in Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Nigeria?

Methodology

Descriptive survey method was adopted for this study. The population of the study consisted of 240 respondents randomly selected among the students, academic staff, non-academic staff and members of the management staff of Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher and validated by experts in educational management and administration whose corrections were effectively followed to improve the quality of the instrument. The collected data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics (percentage scores). The decision rule was based on a benchmark of 70% rating for accepting the questionnaire items. This implies that any item whose percentage rating was less than 70% would be rejected.

Results

Research Question

What are the effects of campus cultist activities on students' academic performance in Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Nigeria?

The data collected for answering the research question is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Influence of Cultism on Students' Academic Performance

	Items	Yes%	No%	Decision
1	It disrupts academic calendar	220(92)	20(8)	Accepted
2	It makes students to be late to class	230(96)	10(4)	Accepted
3	It makes students to abscond from the class	220(92)	20(8)	Accepted

4	It makes students to be unable to properly prepare for tests and examinations	225(94)	15(6)	Accepted
5	It makes lecturers to abscond from lectures	212(88)	28(12)	Accepted
6	It makes students to engage in examination malpractices	200(83)	40(17)	Accepted
7	It makes students to perform poorly in examinations	205 (85)	35(15)	Accepted
8	It makes students to lose interest in academic activities due to the fear of the cultists	190(79)	50(21)	Accepted

Field work: 2021

From the table above, it could be seen that 220 respondents (92%) hold the view that cultism disrupts academic calendar, while 20 respondents (8%) are with contrary view. Two hundred and thirty respondents representing 96% also believe that cultism makes students to be late to class, while 10 (4%) believe that it doesn't make students to be late to class. In the same vein, 220 (92%) see cultism as being responsible for abscond of students in the class, while, 20 (8%) do not have such a notion. Furthermore, 94%, 88%, 83% and 85% of the respondents respectively hold the opinion that cultism leads to poor preparation for test and examinations, abscond of lecturers from class, engagement in examinations malpractices and poor performance in examinations. On the contrary, 6%, 12%, 17% and 15% do not respectively, agree with the statements. Finally, 190 respondents (79%) agree that fear of the cultists makes students to lose interest in academic activities, while 50 respondents (21%) rejected the statement. A look at these show that the respondents agreed that cultism has negative influence on academic performance of students in Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. This because the all the items meet up with the criteria for acceptance. (70%)

Discussion of the Findings

This study found out that cultism has negative influence on academic performance of students in Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings are therefore in line with the findings of Udoh and Ikezu (2015) which found out that cultism leads to decline in academic performance and increase in examination malpractices in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. It is also in tandem with the findings of Mbah, Egwu and Emesini (2018) which revealed that cultism has negative effects on students' regularity and punctuality to school activities as well as academic activities and performance in Ebonyi State University. These findings thus, confirms that the effects of cultism are the same in all the Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning.

Conclusion

This study pointed out that cultism is counter-productive in Nigerian educational environments. This because, the objectives of the founding fathers have been replaced with social problems such as social disorder on the campus, rascality, raping, inter-cult clashes, bloodsheds, threatening of lives among others. The study also established that cultism has negative influence on students' academic performance in Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The implication of this is that cultism is making it difficult for the students to acquire the desired skills that are required to take Nigeria to the promise land and enhance sustainable development in the country

Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study and the conclusion which was drawn, the following recommendations are suggested as the way forward:

- (i) Government should support the school authority in the area of discipline, stoppage and complete eradication of secret cults in the school.
- (ii) Parents should devote more interest and time on the type of company their children keep.
- (iii) The School Management should provide orientation programme to new students and organise advisory talks (lectures through the Guidance and Counselling Unit to enable students adapt into the academic environment.

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