

A Comparative Analysis of Students and Academic Staff Perception of Factors Associated with Cultism in Lagos State College of Primary Education

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Abstract: The study compared the perception of students and academic staff towards factors associated with cultism in Lagos State College of Primary Education (LACOPED). The study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised 716 students and 293 members of staff (81 academic and 212 non-academic staff). The sample comprised 164 respondents (150 students and 14 academic staff) who were selected using multi-stage sampling technique (proportionate stratified and random sampling). The instrument used was a two-part Perception Towards Factors Associated with Cultism Questionnaire (PTFACQ) while t-test statistic was used to analyse the data. A correlation co-efficient of 0.97 got when the instrument was administered on selected subjects at Lagos State University, Epe Campus (having the same locale of study with LACOPED) indicated a strong relationship between the group of responses. The result of the study showed that there is no significant difference in the perception of students and academic staff towards factors associated with cultism. However, there was a significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the factors associated with cultism. Among the recommendations made was that attempts at managing cultism should begin with discipline from the individual at home.

Key words: Academic staff, cultism, indiscipline, secret, students, Students Union Government (SUG)

INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that all forms of students' misbehaviour such as juvenile delinquency, rudeness to or lack of respect for lecturers and constituted authorities as well as other forms of anti-social behaviour have for a long time bedeviled the Nigerian educational system particularly institutions of higher learning. However, the magnitude of these forms of anti-social or deviant behaviour cannot be equated with secret cultism on campuses of institutions of higher learning. In addition, the media attention given to secret cultism has tended to considerably heighten tension about the activities of this social menace in institutions of higher learning.

In recent times, public attention has been focused on the preponderance of evidence of the horrendous activities of secret cults, the perception of the general public particularly that of students, staff and authorities of institutions of higher learning about cultism and the seemingly inaction, lack of social and political will on the part of government or the relevant authorities in institutions of higher learning on curtailing the menace of secret cult. This is moreso when the unprecedented killing of two students of the Lagos State University, Ojo, South-West Nigeria in 1997, the gruesome murder of 6 undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, South-West Nigeria on July 10, 1999 and the unprovoked assassination of a former Student Union President of

the Lagos State University, Ojo on February 17, 2002 as well as many other reported and unreported gruesome killings of innocent students by other students suspected to be secret cult members, are still fresh in our memory. These unprecedented killings of innocent students by people who are sometimes rival cult members, probably prompted or jolted the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1999 to give an ultimatum of three months to all heads of tertiary institutions in Nigeria (both federal and state owned) to wipe out secret cultism on their campuses.

This ultimatum was however not matched with actions as there were renewed or resurgence of killings by suspected cultists on campuses (Jegede, 2000).

Paradoxically, when secret cult found its way into institutions of higher learning in Nigeria through the University of Ibadan in 1952, when a group of individuals came together to form the Pirate Confraternity, it was not meant to be violent but to find moribund conventions, tribalism, conservatism and reviving chivalry (Okirika, 2000). Cultism however took a violent and murderous dimension when splinter groups emerged in 1972 from the original Pirate Confraternity. These groups were made up of those who were either dismissed for indiscipline by the Pirate Confraternity or those who fell out of the Confraternity for one reason or the other and later regrouped to form the Buccaneers or Sea Lords of Nigeria (Dosunmu and Pemedede, 2002; Okirika, 2000; Omokhodion, 1999).

Since the emergence of the splinter groups in 1972, the perception of people generally and students and academic as well as non-academic staff of cult groups has changed for the worse; not with many reported cases of clashes between rival cult groups many of which have led to the untimely death and or maiming of members of the cult groups and innocent students on campuses (Bolaji, 2004).

The motives for joining these cult groups vary from one institutions of higher learning to another. These motives or reasons range from political such as the struggle for power to influence the decision-making process of the entire student body (the Student Union Government-SUG), protection from any form of harassment, as well as for mundane motives such as disagreement and quarrelling over girlfriends and even the belief that one cult group confers more respect and recognition of its members among the student populace than another (Bolaji, 2004; Akrawa, 2000).

Whatever the motive or reason for joining these cult groups, the perception of the general public and members of the ivory towers does not seem to change from what it is: Heinous, violent and deadly (Onanuga, 2003).

This, among other things, prompted the present study which sought to find out the perception of students and academic staff towards factors associated with cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria with specific reference to Lagos State College of Primary Education, Noforija-Epe, Lagos State, South-West Nigeria.

The incessant killings by student-cultists that have engulfed institutions of higher learning in Nigeria coupled with other violent conducts on campuses have led to unquantifiable loss of lives and property. Cultic activities have also caused destructions that have often led to disruptions of academic calendar. Despite many studies that have been conducted (Okirika 2000; Onanuga, 2003) on the menace of secret cultism and the perception of students and academic staff on the factors associated with cultism, the problem has remained seemingly intractable in view of the fact that new cult groups continue to emerge in institutions of higher learning with the perception of the general public (including students and academic staff) showing that their activities are heinous. It is therefore pertinent to investigate the perception of students and academic staff towards factors associated with cultism in institutions of higher learning.

Specifically, this study is set to determine:

- Whether there is a difference in the perception of students and academic staff towards the factors associated with cultism.

- Whether gender difference among students will create any difference in their perception of the factors associated with cultism.

The investigators believe that the outcome of this study would shed more light on the perception of academic staff and students towards the factors associated with cultism in tertiary institutions. It would also reveal the perception of male and female students towards the factors associated with cultism.

In the light of the above, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There will be no significant difference between the perception of students and academic staff towards the factors associated with cultism.
- There will be no significant difference between male and female students' perception towards the factors associated with cultism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: The study adopted the descriptive research design. This was utilized in order to collect detailed and factual information that describe existing phenomenon, identify problems and justify current conditions and practices, determine what others are doing with similar problems or situation and to benefit from others' experiences in order to make future plans and decisions.

Population of the study: The population of the study comprised 716 students and 293 members of staff (made up of 81 academic staff and 212 non-academic staff) of Lagos State College of Primary Education, Lagos, South-West Nigeria.

Sample: The sample comprised 150 students (62 male and 88 female) who were selected using multi-stage sampling (proportionate stratified and simple random sampling) technique. From the four Schools/Faculties used for the study, 77 students were chosen in 200 level while 73 were selected in 300 level. In view of the fact that academic staff belong to the five Schools running academic programmes in the College (including the School of Education for general courses), 14 members of the academic staff were also selected using the same technique.

The sampling was accomplished by collecting the list of both students and academic staff from the Academic Affairs Office and Personnel Division of the College respectively for randomization purposes. All the categories from the two groups of respondent therefore have equal chances of being selected.

Instrumentation: The instrument used for the study was a two-part Perception Towards Factors Associated with Cultism Questionnaire (PTFACQ) designed and validated by the investigators. It has been used in a previous study by one of the investigators (Jegade, 2002). Section A consisted of items seeking general information on sex, status (whether academic staff or student) and School/Faculty of respondents. Section B consisted of 20 items based on respondents' perception of factors (societal, management of institution, academic staff, students causal factors) associated with cultism.

Reliability of research instrument: A test-retest method was used. A correlation co-efficient of 0.97 got when administered to selected subjects at Lagos State University, Epe Campus (having the same locale of study with LACOPED) indicated an absolutely strong relationship between the groups of respondents. An interval of two weeks was given before the same instrument was administered to the same group of people to compare their responses. The instrument was found reliable.

Administration of instrument: The students were met during a general (Education) course of which an approximately 100% attendance was recorded. They were arranged according to their School/Faculty which made it possible to have proportionate representation. The questionnaires were administered and collected back on the spot.

Fourteen questionnaires were also distributed to academic staff who were stratified randomly selected during a government directed staff auditing exercise in the Lagos State College of Primary Education, Lagos, South-West Nigeria in 2006. The same procedure employed for administering questionnaires for students was used for the academic staff.

RESULTS

In order to test the 2 hypotheses, the mean scores were subjected to t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1 indicates that there were 89 male (44.50%) and 111 female (55.50%) respondents. Out of the male respondents, 27 were members of staff while 62 were students. There were also 23 female staff and 88 female students.

Table 2 shows that 150 (91.47%) of the respondents were students while 14 (8.53%) were academic staff. The students and academic staff only were focused in the study since both of them are in constant contact with each other.

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	No. of staff	No. of students	Total	(%)
Male	27	62	89	44.50
Female	23	88	111	55.50
Total	50	150	200	100

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by status

Status/group	Number	(%)
Students	150	91.47
Academic staff	14	8.53
Total	164	100.00

Table 3: T-test analysis of the perception of students and academic staff towards factors associated with cultism

Group/Status	N	X	SD	df	Tc	Tt	Remark
Students	150	50.44	7.88	162	0.54	1.96	NS
Academic staff	14	49.36	4.82				
Total	164						

* $p > 0.05$; not significant

Table 4: T-test analysis of the perception of male and female students towards factors associated with cultism

Group	N	X	SD	df	Tc	Tt	Remark
Male students	62	51.77	8.29	148	2.11	1.96	*S
Female students	88	48.99	7.36				
Total	150						

For the fact that both the students and academic staff are also members of the larger society, one would expect that their perception of the factors associated with cultism would be similar. This is reflected in their response to one of the items on the questionnaire which states that campus cultism is a reflection of the larger society's.

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in the perception of students and academic staff towards factors associated with cultism. The obtained t-value (0.54) is less than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, H_{01} is accepted.

As revealed in Table 4, there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the factors associated with cultism. The calculated t-value of 2.11 is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, H_{02} is rejected.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, it was observed that differences in status (whether academic staff or students) create no significant difference in their perception towards factors associated with cultism. This is in line with earlier studies that some lecturers, heads of department and school administrators who were once members of secret cult in their student days had a positive perception about cultism as they serve as godfather to these students; an act which tends to encourage cultism (Onanuga, 2003; Lasisi, 1998). It further shows that if the

student-cultists do not have the support or backing of their teachers (academic staff) and or some people in authority, the menace would probably have been wiped out (Adepeju, 1997).

Cult members are known to other students, lecturers, other staff and authorities of the institution as it is only their mode of operation that is surreptitious (Omoluwabi, 1998). Cultism on campuses of institutions of higher learning is a manifestation of what goes on in the larger society as parents/guardians belong to secret cults in the larger society. This probably explains why most of the respondents see the society as a major causal factor of cultism. The mean score of 50.44 and 49.36 for students and academic staff respectively showed no significant difference.

The implication of this finding is that the fight against the eradication of secret cultism in institutions of higher learning is that the menace has become a cankerworm that has defied not only institutional solutions but also has affected the smooth running of institutions of higher learning through disruption of normal academic programmes and loss of innocent lives.

There was however an indication that gender difference among students could create a significant difference in their perception towards the factors associated with cultism as the mean scores of 51.77 and 48.99 for male and female students respectively have indicated in the study. It was also perceived that there are more male students in secret cultism than female students. Earlier studies such as Osisami (1998), Omokhodion (1999) among others tend to corroborate the present study that potential cultists are young men who are physically well-built and who use their physique to commit all sorts of heinous crimes such as murder, rape etc. It follows therefore that their (male) perception of cultism on campuses is a motivating factor that spurs them to join secret cult.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study have revealed that status (whether academic staff or students) has no influence on perception towards cultic act. Students feel equally the same with their lecturers at the Lagos State College of Primary Education (LACOPED) on their perception of factors associated with cultism. Gender difference among students (male or female) however affects their perception of factors associated with cultism.

In the light of the above, the investigators have observed that using force to instil discipline in children in Nigeria has not really prevented indiscipline. Any attempt at curbing the menace of secret cult should begin with self discipline. This is achievable through dialogue, persuasion, enlightenment and ensuring that worthwhile

activities (curricula and co-curricula) are increased in institutions of higher learning. Career talks, lectures and symposia as well as counseling services should be organized at regular intervals to pre-occupy and enlighten the students on the dangers of joining secret cults.

Proper orientation should be conducted for students before and during registration of courses. This will give them ample opportunity of identifying the ideal expectation in an academic environment.

Management of institutions of higher learning should face the problem of cultism headlong rather than providing any form of cover up for any member of the institution, such members (staff or students), should be made to face the law if caught engaging in cultism.

Institutions of higher learning should create and incorporate elements of moral and character training in their curriculum in order to keep the minds of both lecturers and students away from any heinous activity. More importantly, lecturers need to keep their students busy by giving and marking assignments regularly that will give the students little or no room for any negative or heinous activity.

Government should also make funds available to institutions of higher learning either to provide more facilities or to complete abandoned projects as these will go a long way in ameliorating the problem of shortage of lecture rooms and other essential infrastructural facilities on campuses.

The present study was carried out in only one tertiary institution (College of Primary Education) in Lagos State. Therefore, more empirical evidence will be required from more tertiary institutions before ample generalization can be made. In the light of this, it is suggested that a similar but more elaborate study be carried out on some of the effects of cultism on institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

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