

CURBING CULTISM AND EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA THROUGH RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Abstract

Cultism and examination malpractices entrenched themselves in the campuses as a result of the moral decadence in the Nigerian society, hence the need for the enthronement of religious studies in the schools to eradicate these vices, because if these vices are not curbed it will hinder national development and enhance insecurity in the schools. Furthermore religious studies should be given prominent position in the schools because it inculcates good moral values such as honesty hard work, love for one's neighbour, value for lives and property, obedience to constituted authority and peaceful co-existence, which will make the students to shun cultism and examination malpractices. The causes of cultism and examination malpractices are: societal decadence, bad parenting, influence of peer groups, admission and employment requirements frequent disruption of the school system and inadequate coverage of syllabus. This study is to create the awareness of the danger of cultism and examination malpractices. It is therefore recommended that religious studies should be included in schools curriculum from primary to tertiary institutions. Parents should inculcate the right moral into their children. Government and school authority should take drastic measures in eradicating Cultism and examination malpractices -in the school system.

Keywords: Cultism, Examination Malpractices and Religious Studies

Introduction

The most essential problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the problem of cultism and examination malpractices, there is no institution of higher learning that has not experienced the menace of cultism and examination malpractices at one time or the other. Examination malpractices and cult related violent activities in most tertiary institutions have caused the sudden death of lecturers and students.

A cult comprises initiated members who are secretive in their activities. Cult activities are usually organized and performed in hideouts (Elegbeleye, 2022). There are several reasons why students in tertiary institutions join secret cull. These reasons include, anti social personality disorder, defence mechanism and inferiority

complex. Some students also join cult due to involvement of certain lecturers and administrators in secret cult. Moreover, uncondusive learning facilities, environment and inadequate welfare programmes as well as in adequate religious and moral instructions can lure students to examination malpractices embracing cult group and cult activities. (Abamba, 2021). Cultists are blood thirsty monsters who lack moral value and do not show any sign of remorse when caught in a nefarious act.

Hardly a semester passes these days, without reports of deaths of students or staff resulting from cult-related violence. This has not only created an atmosphere of insecurity in our campuses, it is also diverting attention from the primary purpose of the universities which is education. Cultism and examination malpractices tendencies are clearly a big problem for the concerned authorities. Taiwo (2023) declared that what we are all witnessing today in the education sector is a sad reflection of corruption and moral decadence in the society and the low priority placed on the standardization and improvement of the intellectual custodians of our time by those in the government. This is against the fact that most members of these cults are from rich homes and are never serious with their studies; thus prompting their venturing into examination malpractices. Whenever they fail their courses, they react violently against the lecturers in charge of their failed courses. They operate and conduct initiation of new members at night in these institutions coming out with dangerous weapons at the middle of the night when students who are ignorant of their activities fall victims

The Concept of Cultism

Ogunbameru (2023) defines cultism or secret cult as any form of organization whose activities are not 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. Hornby (2010) views cultism as a system of religious worship especially one that is expressed in ritual. Adams (2023) defines cult as a small group of people who share a common cause and whose mode of meetings and agenda are unknown to the public and where initiation into their groups is usually done in secret. In other words, cultism can be regarded as a ritual practice by group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operation are kept secret with the activities having negative effects on both members and non members alike.

Concept of Examination Malpractice

Ikpeba (2022) states that Examination Malpractice relates to acts, behaviours and attitudes that run contrary to the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of any examination in the school system. Such malpractice can be described as wrong doing, misconduct, dishonesty or improper practice for personal gain. It is a situation in which students seek to pass examinations through illegal ways without applying their reasonable skills. Olagunju (2023) states that examination malpractice

is the absence of adherence to the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of an examination.

The Concept of Religious Studies

According to Nwaorie (2010) Religious Studies are the exploration of the expression of religion in human culture. It explores human ideal about the divine, as well as the way religious concepts are expressed in text, rituals and belief systems. Mulin (2023) posits that religious studies, studies the history of religion as well as important religious figures. It analyses the influence of religion on other aspects of culture, as well as the influence of culture on religion. As an academic discipline Religious study is not limited to a single tradition or religion, it encompasses all religious from all cultures and all time. It is global in scope and multicultural in tenor

Reasons for Prevalence of Cultist Activities in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions.

It is often claimed that some parents of these cultists, some power drunk politicians and some members of administrative staff and lecturers are the brains behind the sponsoring of evil clubs releasing Funds and weapons to them to carry out their evil acts against humanity. This indecent moral values impacted into these youths have giving them more confidence to feel that nothing will happen to them even if they are caught with the belief that money answers all things. Cultism in larger society has become a celebrated phenomenon among the political class who equally happen to be in control of the wealth of the nation. There are enough resources to sponsor the baby- cultist in our institutions by these sets of politicians. Also some administrative staff and lecturers in the tertiary institutions sponsor the cultist in the schools because they use them against other members of the academic community to promote their selfish interest. Considering the various killings of innocent students in our institutions by cult members, one may want to ask, why have solutions eluded us these years in bringing a stop to the menace of anti social behaviour? We have remained in our present state of confusion for a number of reasons, which according to Taiwo (2023) include:

- i. Lack of concerted and consistence political will to deal with the problem once and for all
- ii. Constantly shifting and unsettled socio cultural and educational policies and practices, which tend to hinder previous efforts at solving the problem,
- iii. Sudden and drastic dislocation of our scale of value whereby the intellectual custodians have become systematically relegated yielding place to other less important priorities,
- iv. Worshipping of money to discredit intellectual zealousness among the upcoming youths.

Odili (2023) gave 11 possible causes of cultism in these institutions to include:

- i. Erosion of education standards
- ii. Economic difficulties
- iii. Emulation of military coup planners
- iv. Adventurism and egotism
- v. Sponsorship by community leaders
- vi. Lack of integration
- vii. Peer group Influence and drug addiction
- viii. Bad parenting and erosion of family values
- ix. Oil bunkering
- x. Sponsorship by politicians.

Abuduwahab (2023) avails that, the diminishing economic prosperity also contributes greatly. There is the crisis of confidence and of filth in our educational institutions leading to a general state of anxiety and an erosion of confidence in getting jobs after school by the majority of the students. From the state of confusion to which the society exposed our youth, one may conclude that cultism is an offshoot and indeed a reflection of our corrupt society, which had for long plunged our educational sector into serious malfunctioning and dislocation. The violence associated with the cults currently can be attributed to the general breakdown of values which we once held sacred. The value attached to human life has reduced drastically that youths can now kill without feeling guilty. We therefore cannot combat the cults menace without paying attention to the problem of the larger society.

An obvious explanation for the resurgence and worsening of cult crisis on the campuses is the inadequate, half-hearted enforcement of the measures already officially pronounced. The slaughter of five students of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife in 1999 prompted Federal Government's adoption of an anti-cult strategy, part of which was an offer of monetary incentive to repentant cult members among students nationwide. In keeping with some recommendations of judicial panel on the cult killings too, the government vowed to establish a unit to identify secret cults and their activities in all tertiary institutions. Also, the government empowered heads of the institutions to summarily dismiss any student openly identified as a cult member, and proposed a data-bank of students so dismissed to forestall their re-admission into any other similar institutions in Nigeria. Had these been adequately enforced, the soaring rate of cultism would have been drastically reduced, but the government has merely pointed its anti-cult armory without really using the weapons to fight the bloody cults.

Besides, the government's order to heads of tertiary institutions to summarily dismiss cult members among their students is rendered ineffectual by the plea of the police, in a number of cases; of non-existence of a relevant laws to prosecute students for their involvement in cult activities as the long-standing decree prohibiting cultism on the campuses is rendered unenforced, null and void. Such expelled students have often safely returned to their institutions for being secret cult members brandishing court orders for their reinstatement. The handling of serious cult cases

with levity by the police and the judiciary, combined with the thickening suspicion that a number of parents, influential politicians and government officials sponsor cultism on the campuses, give the cultists the erroneous feeling that they would always escape punishment or if at all convicted, would suffer mild punishment (*Daily Champion*, 2004).

Forms of Examination Malpractice

Forms of examination malpractice have been identified and discussed by many authors and writers in our national dailies, magazines etc. These include bringing in foreign material into the examination halls, impersonation, examination leakage, immoral relationship between lecturers and students, writing on different parts of the body etc. Students who involve themselves in these forms of examination malpractice give them different names.

Usen (2022) outlined these forms and names as "Blocking""ECOWAS" cooperation, "Chukuli" "Dobbing""Open window system" "Giraffing", "Super print", "Micro-chips""Bullet" and "Missiles" etc. All these forms of examination malpractice mentioned above are still being practiced today and new, more sophisticated methods such as mobile phone, walkie-talkies and programmable calculators are used in different examinations and at different levels of our educational system. According to Nwakaji (2020) a number' of offences which constitute examination malpractice are as follows:

1. Engaging in unauthorized communication in whatever form while examination is in progress
2. Influencing any examination official before, during or after the exam with a view to gaining an advantage.
3. Writing on any unauthorized paper during the examination other than on the answer booklet
4. Changing of position in the examination hall without permission.
5. Possession and use of programmable calculator or wristwatch and unauthorized electronic communication devices inside the examination hall.
6. Consulting unauthorized notes or books inside the examination hall.
7. Passing on a copy of the question set in the paper or a solution-thereof to anyone.
8. Given assistance to or receiving assistance from any student, staff/group such as writing on the question paper or exchange of question paper or exchange of answer booklet.
9. Aiding and abetting any other candidate to copy from any materials.
10. Communicating or attempting to communicate directly or indirectly with the examination officials with a view to influencing them in the award of marks.
11. Unauthorized alteration of marks with a view to favouring or disfavouring a particular student.

12. Destroying evidence/exhibits by chewing or other means.
13. Being in possession of examination materials such as answer booklet before and/or after examination
14. Assisting another candidate in the execution of practical during examination.
15. Being in possession of solution to a question or questions in the examination hall.
16. Making any prior arrangement to obtain help in connection with the question on in the examination hall,
17. Smuggling in or out answer booklet.
18. Impersonation; any Student/person found assisting or being assisted by another student/person in writing a test or examination.
19. Stealing question papers, solution or any materials relevant to the examination from the officials' desk, table etc.
20. Attacking invigilators or any examination officer in or out of the examination hall.

The Causes of Examination Malpractice

Adewumi (2023), posits that, the factors that could bring about examination malpractice include the factors discussed below.

Societal Expectations/Orientation

It is the general notion of the entire populace in Nigeria that once you have gone to school; you must graduate with a good result. Anything short of that is regarded as a failure or a dropout. Your honour and your prestige are at stake. In this respect, certificate is valued as a means to an end. Thus, all means whether straight or crooked are 'employed to achieve these objectives. In short, there is too much emphasis on paper qualifications without any thought of the ability of the individual to put into practice the knowledge so claimed to have been acquired.

Parents' Status and Students' Inordinate Ambition

Research findings by Ezewu and Obanya as cited by Adewurni (2023) indicate that academic aspiration of the school child is positively related to the socio-economic status of the parents. This is so because children always imitate their parents and many of them would wish to be like their highly educated or 'even better than their parents. Some parents want their children to take up their profession at all cost. Consequently, we see a situation where some parents go to the extent of buying examination question papers for their wards and also lavishing invigilators and supervisors with gifts to permit cheating in the examination hall.

Admission Requirements

In every institution of learning, there are specific admission policies or requirements. For instance, from secondary school to university level, prospective applicants are expected to possess some minimum qualifications before being considered for admission, students know that they must possess the relevant subjects for the course of study. In an attempt to satisfy these requirements, therefore some of them feel that something must be done to avoid failure in their examination, so as to guarantee the achievement of their career goals. The final consequence of this is that many of them resort to cheating during the prescribed examination (s) so as to fulfill their academic ambitions,

Employment Requirements

Qualifications are the major parameters being used for employment or for filling vacancies in enterprise. Getting the certificate then becomes the most important thing to many prospective applicants for securing jobs. The effect of this is that the students who are academically weak but who desire good jobs on graduation easily resort to examination malpractice.

General State of the Economy

In a nation like ours where there is a high inflationary trend due to the already battered economy, people seize every available opportunity to make both ends meet. People believe that without money, they cannot make it. The officials of examination bodies, are mercenaries that are hired to write for the students. Some teachers and some corrupt supervisors/invigilators are no exception. Most of them use their position to make money fraudulently.

In addition the monetary gains accruable to the business of examination malpractice have toughened the syndicates, pushing them to become more hardened regardless of the cost of sanctions imposed by examination bodies and government.

Absence of Moral and Religions Instruction

Absence of moral and religious instruction in schools has led to low moral standards in the society, which many believe is responsible for the widespread cheating during examinations with its attendant consequence. Because of this low moral standard in the society, decay has set in, and hard work is not regarded nowadays as important. Those who work hard are looked at as fools in the society.

Government Attitude

There are indications that examination malpractice has become a booming racket in different parts of the country because government attitude towards the menace. For instance, despite various penalties that have been imposed on examination malpractice over the years, no single candidate has faced the full wrath of

the law (21 years jail term without option of fine) as provided for under Decree No.20 of 1984 now act No 33 of 1999.

Frequent Disruption in the School System

The frequent disruption in the school system as a result of strike is equally a contributory factor. Once the academic system is disrupted students to a large extent are not prepared for examinations, this explains why they resort to cheating.

The Enabling Environment

The enabling environment for serious academics the country is not adequate. With dilapidated infrastructure, lack of instructional materials and lack of parental support for some students, contributed to the decay in the educational system. Government at different levels in Nigeria gives operational approval to private and public educational institutions without science laboratory and their students routinely -participate in science practical", It is not unexpected that such improperly prepared students will engage in examination malpractice.

Inadequate Coverage of Syllabus -

Many believe that inadequate coverage of syllabus is also responsible for exam malpractices in our schools. Running to class three weeks to teach students is a fire brigade approach. This could lead to cheat in order to make good grades.

The Effects of Cultism and Examination Malpractices on Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

The social vices bedeviling the Nigerian society have permeated in the entire segment of the education sector. The manifestations are, cultism and examination malpractice which have become endemic in the Nigerian educational system. The effects of cultism on the learning process cannot be exhausted as both intra and inter cult clashes negatively affect the students in a very high proportion. It sometimes leads to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent students and cult members. Cult activities such as killing, maiming, raping of fellow students and even lecturers may disrupt the academic calendar of the nation's institutions of learning. The peace on campus is adversely affected whenever there is cult invasion. This may result in suspension of academic activities for sometime. This singular act can affect the years of graduation of students and may discourage some students from studying in the university affected. Also, a lot of lives and properties have been destroyed through cult violence.

Examination malpractice has a negative impact on the goals of education which renders it invalid and leads to irreversible loss of credibility. A country that becomes noted for examination malpractice loses international credibility. The implication is that documents emanating from such country will be treated with suspicion. It also leads to expulsion and rustication of students.

Religion as a Tool for Curbing Cultism and Examination Malpractices

Negligence of moral and religious instructions in schools have led to low moral standard in the society which many believe is responsible for the wide spread cheating during examinations, cultism, with their attendant consequences. As a result of low moral standard in the society, decay have set in and hard work is no longer regarded as important. Those who work hard are looked upon as fools in the society, Religion is a force that can be used to curb these social vices because religion plays the role of inward conviction which will exert the strongest influence upon all citizens of the country.

Religion inculcates moral discipline into individuals which will help in eradicating social vices in the society. It provides inspirations required by Nigerians to unite and fight against these vices. More so, religion is a reliable and potent element for the eradication of social vices, as well as a veritable weapon for promoting healthy school environment. Students and teachers must adhere to religious tenets to enable it produce total transformation of lives for the enhancement of educational development.

Furthermore, religion permeates every aspect of human life. It lays emphasis on moral consciousness which is the life wire of any society. As Nigerian education system today is characterized by cultism and examination malpractices, religion has to be given a priority because a morally conscious individual thinks better, acts better, and is amendable to the details of consciousness which will enhance conducive learning environment, (Eze, 2022).

Conclusion

For a healthy school environment, religious education which inculcates positive attitudes, norms and moral values should be enthroned in the school to bring sanity in the educational system. Religion is an indispensable and critical element for the shaping of character of students which will promote peaceful co-existence and enhance national security. The moral decadence in the school system caused by the negligence of religious instruction will be eradicated through the entrenchment of religious studies in the school system. Religion remains the foundation upon which healthy school environment could be achieved because it will discourage students from participating in cultism and examination malpractices.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, the paper wishes to make the following suggestions:

1. The actualization of positive school climate will continue to be a mirage if cultism and examination malpractices are not eradicated from the school system. Therefore, Government should lay more emphasis on religious studies at all levels of education for the inculcation of right morals into the students

2. There should be moral upbringing of children by their parents to checkmate their unruly behaviour and exhibit character that conform to the societal norms and values.
3. Government should enforce anti-cultism, and anti examination malpractice laws which will discourage students from involving themselves in these vices and bring sanity to the school system.
4. There should be re-orientation in our tertiary institutions and government should provide adequate funding which will enable the school system to be conducive for effective teaching and learning.
5. Certificate should be awarded to the students based on their performance and character exhibited during the course of study. Any student with character disorder should not be awarded the degree and must be punished accordingly.
6. Government should discourage laziness and fraudulent act and emphasizes more on hard work, integrity and peaceful co-existence.
7. Finally, students should be made to appreciate and value knowledge because 'knowledge as they say is power'. Therefore, students should obey and respect the 'constituted authority for them to obtain the knowledge required for their graduation.

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