

STRATEGIES IN CURBING CULTISM IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

FOLORUNSO, I. A.

School of Education,
Department of Educational Psychology,
Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the innovative and durable strategies in curbing the menace of cultism in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The paper observes that cultism is a social vice plaguing most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. It also discussed the concept and underlying motives of cultist and the theoretical basis for the origin of cultism in Nigeria. The paper further elucidate strategies for combating cultism which include inter-alia body language as indicator to apprehend cultists, frequent curbing of black out areas by security operatives, combined surveillance of institution's security outfits with other law enforcement agents and the use of closed circuit television in monitoring cultist activities within campus environment.

INTRODUCTION

More often than not, institutions of higher learning which are saddled with academic and moral responsibilities have been finding it difficult to perform this onerous task purposely because of some distractions in the school settings. One of these distractions is the issue of cultism which has turned our citadels of learning to a theater of warfare, insecurity and as such academic activities are disrupted with sheer impurity by these campus miscreants. It is in the light of the above that this paper attempts to proffer innovative strategies at combating this ugly campus monster that continues to rear its heads unabatedly.

Concept of Cultism

Oganija (2002) conceives cultism as a faceless group refusing to subscribe to the standard mode of registration by hiding their groups, or cohorts' identities and mode of operation. However Oladeji (2003) defines a cult, secret cult or secret society as a belief, practice or a body of persons operating a ritual secretly in

specially restricted enclaves and has a taint of illegality, wickedness or is devilish in its aims, objectives or operations. Adam and Godsby (1995) define cultism as an extreme religious group that is not of an established religion while Giddens (2000) sees cultism as a dabble into spiritism, astrology and transcendental meditation.

However, for the purpose of this paper, cultism is defined as an extreme and illegal gathering of individuals who share the same thought and belief system in pursuing a common goal. It could also be seen as an illegal gathering of like – minded individuals who pursue the same objective with scathing and dangerous dexterity.

From the foregoing, one could summarize that the basic objective of a ‘cult’ is to draw individuals, or persons into a fold of which membership of that fold are not known or duly recognized by an existing legal authority. In other words, cultists are not duly registered as an association in tertiary institutions. It is however worthy of note that an association with dastardly motives and objectives can seek legal registration from the school authority under a deceitful and false pretext but the fact remains that such gathering of people conduct their affairs in a secret atmosphere intentionally escaping the prying eyes of the school management and any other neutral observer as the case may be.

Theoretical Framework

The formation of organization and groups for socialization is as old as man himself and organizations are formed based on religious, social, emotional or cultural affiliation (Opatola 2002). Feuer (1969) however opines that the formation of student movement in most cases is inspired by the aim which the students try to explicate in political ideology and moved by emotional rebellion in which there is always present disillusionment with and rejection of the values of the older generation. It is equally important to stress that the exhibition of deviant behaviour(s) is due to the fact that some people seem unable to control their impulse or consider long term cost versus short term gains (Wilson & Herrington 1985).

However, Sutherland (1949) explicate the concept of crime to what he referred to as ‘differential association’ wherein individuals become delinquent through association with people who are the carriers of criminal norms. In the view of Sutherland (1949) criminal behaviour is learnt within primary groups, particularly peer groups. In line with the above, Oladeji (2002) submits that campus cult sub culture can be regarded as counter-culture because of their violent gang

categorization which not only differs from dominant institutional cultural patterns but equally challenges them and as such it poses threat to campus peace.

Underlying Motives of Cultist

It is worthy of interest to identify the major underlying motives of cultists as this will expose the major reason(s) why its membership is always on the increase in tertiary institutions. Membership of cults groups cut across all social backgrounds, age and gender and the activities of these groups range from rape, forgery, impersonation to examination malpractice among others (Opatola 2002).

Equally worthy of note is the fact that students engage in cultist activities in order to seek for protection against a seemingly 'oppressive' force or agent as the case may be. Membership drive of cultists are usually predicated upon the assumption that it will provide a safe haven for protection against oppressive force.

However, the oppressive foe could be a lawful constituted authority (school management), counterpart cult or any individual or group of individuals who might have wronged any of its members.

Vengeance is another underlying motive why students join cults on campus. In order to settle scores, a cult is usually regarded as a veritable ground to organize and execute a deadly line of action against a perceived enemy or foe who has stepped on toes. The cult groups are rivals in every way and are always at each others throat proving superiority over one another. Apart from rival cultists, innocent students also suffer at the hand of these devilish groups; they cheat and manipulate the innocent ones, getting them initiated against their wishes (Oladeji 2002).

Strategies in Combating Cultism

Obviously, many scholars have advanced various forms of control of cultist activities in schools and this span from review of admission policy of tertiary institutions, review of school curriculum, provision of recreational/sporting activities, to organizing orientation programme for students in tertiary institutions and asking the National Assembly to make a law making cultism a grievous offence and as such attract capital punishment (Oladeji, 2002; Opatola 2002). This paper however will deviate from these aforementioned strategies and focus on curative and on the spot strategies at eliminating and eradicating cultist activities in tertiary institutions.

Obviously, Cultists' activities are conducted in secrecy and as such the venues of such meetings are hideouts, serene and deserted areas within and around the campuses. In the light of the above, security outfits in higher institutions should endeavor to identify blackout areas or spots where nocturnal meetings of cultists could be held. In addition to the above, serene atmosphere in and around the campuses that has conglomeration of trees with seeming like recreational background are hide-outs of cultists. To this end, when proper identification of such areas has been done, it prepares a veritable background for security operatives in schools to apprehend cultists.

Security operatives on campuses should be trained in the latest technology of surveillance especially in gathering vital information by using covert activities in detecting students who engage in cultism. To this end, when covert security dragnets are spread in and around campuses, then the work of the security outfit could best be successful and result oriented.

It is also pertinent to state, that school management in various institutions of Higher learning should in close conjunction with faculties of Technology or Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology provide closed circuit Television unit that will be connected to suspected hideouts of cultists wherein their secret meetings could be monitored and recorded live without them having an inkling that their nefarious and nocturnal activities are being recorded and thus leading to their being apprehended and made to face the full wrath of the law.

Also, a combined surveillance of various institutions security outfits with other law Enforcement Agents should be encouraged in the identification and subsequent arrest of suspected cultists in and around the campuses. To this end, enough fund should be made available to the security unit of higher institutions for them to be able to carry out timely operations to wipe out the ugly menace of cultist' activities in and around our campuses.

Lastly, body languages technique could be used largely in identification of cult members. In this direction, cultists have weird looks, queer attitude and knack for weird colours such as red attire that connotes danger and black attire which is symbolic of death to any one who dares to usurp their kingdom. Moreover there is a close link between hard drugs and cultism. As such any student within and around the school campus that is apprehended with hard drug is a suspected cultist. To this end, security operatives in higher institutions should be alert to their responsibilities and most especially, a stop and search mode of operation should be carried on students who possess any of the aforementioned body language.

Conclusion

To a large extent, no effort should be spared at total eradication of cultist activities in and around school campuses especially when consideration is given to the fact that unchecked cultist activities in and around school campuses could snowball into terrorist gang which has held the country into ransom in recent times.

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