



**STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE INFLUENCE OF CULTISM ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE  
IN EKITI STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined students' perception on the influence of cultism on students' academic performance in Ekiti State University. The study employed a descriptive research design of the survey type. A total number of 100 undergraduates used as sample for the study were selected by using purposive sampling technique. The instrument used was a self-constructed questionnaire titled "Students' Perception on Cultism" (SPC) that contained 30 items based on the construct of this study. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis of mean, standard deviation, t-test and Analysis of Variance. Results of the study showed that there was a significant difference ( $t=5.185$ ) between the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism on Students' academic performance in tertiary institution. It also showed that there was no significant difference ( $F=1.012$ ) between the undergraduates perception of the influence of cultism on Students' academic performance in tertiary institution based on their levels. Therefore, it was recommended that; Proper sanction should be given to the culprits regardless of their sex. Also, proper and consistent orientation should be given to the students from the day they enter into the tertiary institution till the day they graduate on the consequences of involvement in cultism*

**Keywords:** Students' Perception, Cultism, Academic Performance, Tertiary Institution,

**Introduction**

Tertiary institutions, such as Universities, polytechnics and teachers training colleges have been known to provide the social atmosphere which allows students, administrators and academics alike to enjoy peaceful co-existence and excellence in education. In the case of students, the existence of and participation in clubs and organizations on campuses ensure that they become well rounded and well-adjusted individuals at the conclusion of their course of study. This scenario applied to institutions of higher learning in Sierra Leone until two decades ago when cultism reared its ugly head on campuses.

In defining cultism, Azelama, Alude and Imhonde (2004) noted that "cult is an assemblage of people united by certain ideals, or symbols and whose rites and ceremonies of veneration are unique and shrouded in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken". Maxey (2004) traces the meaning of

cult from the Latin word 'cultus' which means 'to worship or give reverence to a deity'. Thus, in its original usage, it was simply applied to a religious worshipful group of people regardless of the object or person they venerated.

Rotimi (2005) cites the anthropological definition of 'cult' by Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) as 'a set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god'. The same dictionary gives a sociological definition of a cult as 'a small group of religious activists whose beliefs are typically secrete, esoteric and individualistic' Aguda (1997), Ogunbameru (1997) and the Free Encyclopedia (2006) define cult in a similar manner. Langone (1988) indicated that cult leaders have absolute control over the members of the movement and as such they use force to subdue them under their command. The author concluded that



because cults tend to be leader centered, exploitative and harmful, they come into conflict with and threatened by the rational open and benevolent system of members' families and society at large and that it is an exploitatively manipulative and abusive group in which members are induced to serve the group leader(s). From these accounts, it can be deduced that cults and cultism have certain elements in common. They are esoteric, shrouded in secrecy, usually made up of a small group of people with a charismatic leader, and may or may not be religious in nature.

The emergence of secret cults in tertiary institutions in Africa can be traced back to the early 1950s. According to Opaluwah (2000), what is known as a secret cult in tertiary institutions started at The University College, Ibadan, Nigeria in 1953. The author stated that it was formed by Nigeria's only Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and others. Their main objectives included the abolition of convention; the revival of the age of chivalry and to end tribalism and elitism. He further observed that Nigeria in the 1940s and 1950s was on the verge of gaining political independence, political parties sprang up in major centers of the country which raised political awareness. Nigerian students were not left out of this social change and formed this group, which it must be noted, was not to harm, maim or kill and destroy. The club therefore became an elite club only for the cleanest, brightest and politically conscious. They tele-guided political events and held important positions within the students' body such as president, chief judge, public relations officer and secretary. Their existence was well known by students and not associated with weird, harmful and spiteful character of latter-day confraternities. The author concluded that over the years, due to doctrinal differences and inability of intending members to meet required standards of the pyrates confraternity, protestant

ones such as 'Buccaneers', 'Mafia' and 'Vikings' started to emerge. The early 90's witnessed a boom as every university was plagued with cult explosion with both males and females involved.

Rotimi (2005) asserted that the secret cult phenomenon is not new in Africa. Citing Aguda (1997), the author observed that activities of secret cults, like 'Human Leopards' and 'Human crocodiles', have been recorded in Central Africa. Furthermore in citing Thomas (2002), the author stated that cultist groups enjoy subtle support and patronage from both government and school authorities. Cult members were sometimes used by politicians for revenge and for setting personal scores. He went on to state that in some cases, past members who had migrated to foreign countries sometimes remitted money to support their former cult groups. Support by past members has also been observed in Sierra Leone where past members well placed in academia, commerce and industry regularly render financial support and participate in their former cults' activities.

Several writers have attempted to uncover the underlying factors that were responsible for the metamorphosis of these harmless social groups on tertiary education campuses into the cults that they have now become, more so characterized by violence. Smah (2001) was of the opinion that the emergence and perpetration of such violent sub-cultural societies in Nigeria were partly to counter the harassment unleashed on students and staff by the state security operatives during the military eras. Smah (2001) cited Alemika (2000) as stating, 'Under Babangida and Abacha military dictatorship, vice councilors, provosts and rectors derived or arrogated to themselves, untrammelled powers to harass, intimidate and cause the arrest of progressive students and academics - a culture of authoritarianism and impunity was institutionalized during these



regimes. All sorts of security were brought into campuses'.

Rotimi (2005) stated that students are attracted to cultist groups for a variety of reasons. He noted that generally, the social atmosphere prevailing in Nigeria Universities provides an inspiring environment for secret cults to thrive. These may include lack of virile student unionism, erosion of the traditional academic culture; absence of intellectual debates and all other activities that are components of traditional campus culture. The author added that those who eventually enlist in secret cult groups might have been encouraged to do so because of "sagging egos" that need to be boosted. Others join in order to have a sense of belonging and the need to be well connected and still others may join because of the need for financial assistance, to secure girl-friends, for self-protection or because they are seeking after meaning, direction, comfort and love.

An integral part of cult activities is the recruitment process. In a study carried out with undergraduate Nigerian university students, Azelama, Alude and Imhonde (2004) observed that most of the secret cult members were discovered not to have willingly obtained membership. In addition, most of the students who were intimidated to join campus secret cults were later to discover upon joining that they could not opt out for fear of being killed. The author added that most often, students are either persuaded or victimized to obtain membership of a cult, by friends and in some occasion by lecturers who themselves were cult members when they were students.

Closely linked with recruitment is the initiation process where new members are made to exhibit bizarre behaviour and to perform horrendous acts of violence. New members are made to conduct unprotected and indiscriminate sex. According to Rotimi (2005), new

recruits must demonstrate some stoic abilities, especially the ability to bear pain. He added immediately after new recruits have been thoroughly screened, the first step being the swearing of an oath of allegiance and secrecy. During the initiation ceremony, new entrants are subjected to thorough beating as a means of toughing them up and testing their endurance for pain. In addition, they are sometimes given a tough assignment such as raping a very popular female student. In the case of Sierra Leone universities, new recruits are made to carry out bizarre act as eating uncooked food, fighting with dogs, wrestling one another, performing acts of bravado and stealing. Dauda (2006) observed that, there are now incidents of cultist activities on our campuses, with oath taking, and blood sucking ceremonies, cases of burglary and house breaking, raping involving sons and daughters of highly placed members of society under the influence of drugs, such as cocaine, indian hemp and so on.

The gravity of the impact and consequences of intra and inter cult clashes on campuses have resulted in physical harm on individual, disruption of the learning process, destruction of college property and even death which all contribute to the breeding of feelings of insecurity. Opaluwah (2000) noted that cult clashes led to an outburst of violence on the campus which left many students wounded, maimed or killed. In a study carried out in universities of the middle Belt zone in Nigeria, Smah (2001) reported that 15% of students had either observed or reported cult/gang motivated deaths on the university campuses between one and two times in the previous years. Yusuf (2006) noted that at least one hundred students in higher institutions in Nigeria were killed in cult related incident in the year 2006 alone.

Apart from physical damage and loss of life, cult activities may also have devastating effect on the learning



process itself. Opaluwah (2000) stated that cult clashes led to the incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent and guilty students and hospitalization of students thereby suspending learning for some period of time. In addition to the physical damage and disruption of the learning process, life on university campuses where cultist activities prevail can be very unpleasant and insecure for those who are not directly involved with them. The author was of the opinion that the psyche of students and the peace of the campus could be adversely affected. Smah (2001) noted that the feeling of insecurity and fear of cultism were high in Nigeria tertiary education campuses.

Numerous factors have been identified to be responsible for the continuous declining in our educational system. Various factors such as classroom size, poor teacher-student ratio, inadequate instructional materials, attitude of teachers towards work and lack of seriousness on the part of students. With the availability of more qualified teachers, improved technology and facilities for teaching and learning, educational system in Nigeria still appears losing its values.

This research is based on the fact that some students are exceptionally good in their academics, while some are extremely bad. When such variations in scores are traced, it is more often discovered that students' involvement in cultism is a major contributory factor. It is therefore important that the levels of such contributions and the influence they have on students' academic performance be examined so that useful suggestions to parents, teachers, educational planners and government could be made.

One worrying development is that the activities of cults in institutions of higher learning are now influencing groups in other institutions including secondary schools. Hence, the need to

examine undergraduates' perceptions on the influence of Cultism on Students' academic performance in tertiary institutions

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the perception of undergraduates on the influence of cultism on students' academic performance in Ekiti State University. Specifically the study aimed at:

- (i) Comparing the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism on students' academic performance in tertiary institutions
- (ii) Comparing the perception of undergraduates on the influence of cultism on students' academic performance in tertiary institutions based on students' levels

#### **Research Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism in tertiary institution
2. There is no significant difference between the undergraduates' perception of the influence of cultism in tertiary institution based on their levels

#### **Methodology**

This study employed descriptive research design of the survey type. The population for the study consisted of 15,786 students of Ekiti State University of 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 Session as obtained from the Registry, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. A total of 100 students were selected through purposive sampling technique as sample for the study which cut across the entire department in the faculty of Education, Ekiti State University. A test-retest method of reliability was used; the instruments were administered on 20 students who were not among the sample for the study on



two occasions with an interval of two weeks. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation yielded a coefficient ( $r$ ) 0.75 which was found highly enough for the study.

## Results

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism in tertiary institution

**Table 1:** t-test showing the difference in the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism in Ekiti State University

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	$t_{cal}$	$t_{table}$
Male	41	31.61	13.974			
Female	59	47.66	16.031	98	5.185*	1.980

\* $P > 0.05$

(Result significant)

Table 1 shows that  $t_{cal}$  (5.185) is greater than  $t_{table}$  (1.980) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not accepted. This implies that there is a significant difference between the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism on Students' academic performance in Ekiti State University

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference between the undergraduates perception of the influence of cultism in tertiary institution based on their levels

**Table 2:** Analysis of Variance showing the difference between undergraduates perception of the influence of cultism in Ekiti State University based on their levels

Source of Variance	SS	Df	MSS	$F_{cal}$	$F_{tab}$
Between Group	792.933	3	264.311	1.012	2.680
Within Group	25072.067	96	261.167		
Total	25865.000	99			

$P > 0.05$

(Result not significant)

Table 2 shows that  $F_{cal}$  (1.012) is less than  $F_{table}$  (2.680) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that there is no significant difference between the undergraduates

perception of the influence of cultism on Students' academic performance in Ekiti State University based on their levels

## Discussion

This study revealed that there was a difference between the perception of male and female undergraduates on the influence of cultism on Students' academic performance in Ekiti State University. This is in line with the findings of Dauda (2006), who observed that, there are now incidents of cultist activities on our campuses, with oath taking, and blood sucking ceremonies, cases of burglary and house breaking, raping involving sons and daughters of highly placed members of society under the influence of drugs, such as cocaine, Indian hemp and so on.

The study also revealed that there was no significant difference between the undergraduates perception of the influence of cultism in tertiary institution based on their levels. This result is in contrast to the findings of Azelama, Alude and Imhonde (2004), who observed that most of the secret cult members were discovered not to have willingly obtained membership, most of the students who were intimidated to join campus secret cults were later to discover upon joining that they could not opt out for fear of being killed owing to their levels.

## Conclusion

This study specifically showed that gender perception on the influence of cultism on students' academic performance differs at all levels. It also showed that undergraduates' level at the institutions did not determine their involvement in cultism.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was therefore recommended that;

Proper sanction should be given to the culprits of cultism regardless of their sex. Moreover, proper and



consistent orientation should be given to the students from the day they enter into the tertiary institution till the day they graduate on the consequences of involvement in cultism

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