

A Critique of Students' Vices and the Effect on Quality of Graduates of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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KEYWORDS Students; vices; education; socialization; society; social problems

ABSTRACT One of the most pressing issues in minds of people in Nigeria as far as education is concerned today is that pertaining to the quality or standard of education. Qualitative education should lead to detectable gains in knowledge, skills and values. There are, however, several students' vices that seem to be militating against realization of the desired qualitative education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of these vices are cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractice, obscene dressing and sexual promiscuity/harassment. Each of these vices and the possible social and academic implications are explained. Major employers of Nigerian graduates have widely agreed on quality decline in higher education in the country, particularly in the areas of communication in oral and written English and technical proficiency. It is recommended that the responsibility of preventing or curbing general students' vices in Nigerian tertiary institutions be a collective one resting on parents, teachers, religious leaders, authorities of the institutions as well as government. This can be done through appropriate upbringing, counseling and necessary sanctions.

INTRODUCTION

Vices are forms of evil, wicked and criminal actions or behaviours in the society. Vices are social problems and have been thought of as social situations that a large number of observers feel are inappropriate and need remedying. Vices are those acts and conditions that violate societal norms and values.

Using what was presumed as the universal criteria for "normality", sociologists commonly assumed that social "pathology" was the consequence of "bad" people. Social problems resulted from the actions of maladjusted people who were abnormal because of mental deficiency, mental disorder, lack of education or incomplete socialization. These "social pathologists" assumed that the basic norms of society are universally held. In this absolutist view, social problems are behaviours or social arrangements that disturb the moral order (Eitzen, 1980).

Nigerian society is a highly dynamic one. The dynamism gives rise to new issues of public interest. It also generated new problems and pose daunting challenges for which the society and its people cannot overlook. If there is any issue that is most pressing in the minds of people as far as education is concerned today, it is that pertaining to the quality or standard of education.

Critics point out that policy-makers and

planners are more concerned with the number educated or number graduating rather than with quality of graduates. According to Fadipe and Oluchukwu (1999), qualitative aspect of education should be viewed as a living and moving thing whose goodness resides not only in its excellence relative to certain standards but in its excellence and fitness to the changing needs of the particular students and the society it is intended to serve. Qualitative education should therefore lead to detectable gains in knowledge, skills and values. There are, however, several students' vices that seem to be militating against realization of the desired qualitative education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of the common ones (vices) include cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractice, obscene dressing, and sexual promiscuity/harassment. The remaining part of this paper examines each of these vices and the possible social and academic implications in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Suggestions on ways to curb these menaces are also made.

CULTISM

According to Denga (1991), cultism is a system of religious belief and practice or an ideology. Orukpe (1988) defined secret cults as a group of people who share and propagate peculiar secret beliefs divulged only to members.

In addition, their initiation procedures often involve secret rituals like swearing by some deity, human blood and other procedures, which send shivers down the spines of most people. Occultism or possession of mystical power is often associated with cults. However, because of their rather secret *modus operandi*, the veracity of this thinking is difficult to ascertain.

Sometimes, secret cults attend functions of members like marriages, burial ceremonies, naming ceremonies and the like. Some secret societies appear in uniforms that are usually odd and easy to identify. Non-members that appear in their uniforms (usually black over black) are harassed, embarrassed and even beaten or killed. Some of their clandestine activities include nocturnal meetings in very odd places like cemeteries, valleys, abandoned buildings, etc. They usually engage themselves in gangsters' activities like taking of cocaine, marijuana (Indian hemp) and even drink human blood. They take delight in seeing fellow human beings suffer and die gruesomely.

Cultism, like gangsterism, is a global social problem. In 1999, Britain witnessed the upsurge in the activities of satanic group members who were said to be having horrific fun in killing cats. More than 100 cats were killed and mutilated by the group members in the sickening wave of ritual attacks. The cats killed had their heads, tails, and hind legs removed with cleaver (Sunday Champion, 1999).

The origin of the phenomenon of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institution is traceable to the formation of pirate confraternity at the University of Ibadan in 1952 by Wole Soyinka and members of his group mainly as a lobby group of students in order to score even with the university authorities. Besides, one of the objectives of the group was to inspire patriotic sentiments and to check the neo-colonialist mentality spreading among the nation's educated class due to western education. At that time, violence was not said to have manifested in their conduct. Nevertheless, this initially peaceful group later snowballed into an esoteric gang whose members were highly steeped in ritualism and voodooism. From there, with its inherently contagious effect the phenomenon of cultism has virtually spread to almost all the tertiary institutions in the country and fast spreading to the secondary schools.

Secret cult groups are now dreaded on the campuses. Because of their secret activities and

ascribed mysticism and power, members enjoy an aura of fearsomeness especially from non-members.

According to Nwadike (2003), there are about 45 secret cults in Nigerian institutions of learning and are all equipped with an elaborate hierarchy, insignia and distinct attire. Some of the most notable of these secret cult groups include the Sea Dogs, Black Axe, Aiye, Vikings, Amazons, White Angels, Black Brassiers, Buccaneer Confraternity, etc.

Cultism leads to outbreak of violence on campuses and its attendant destruction of lives and property. "Peace on campus initiative" (an organization formed to help control cultism on Nigerian campuses) revealed that as at September, 2003, 5,000 students and lecturers have died on Nigerian campuses as a result of cult-related violent clashes (New Age, 2003).

The frequent outbreaks of cult wars in some campuses have generated feelings of fear and social insecurity among students and lecturers. The unhealthy rivalry among secret cult groups often intensify acts of terrorism and hatred among students on campuses. These sometimes result in the closure of tertiary institutions for quite a long time, which has negative effect on implementation of academic programmes.

Generally, the goals and objectives of cult activities in our institutions are not very clear and meaningful. In most cases, youths join cult groups to gain recognition and popularity and to enhance social life on the campus. They easily mobilize or force other students to join riots or demonstrations against constituted authorities or even against other cult groups that oppose their operations. Whenever their member is expelled from school on grounds of poor academic performance or anti-social behaviour, they generate and cause troubles that usually lead innocent students into riots and destruction of college or university property. They use threats to intimidate girls to befriend them and engage in the taking of dangerous drugs to become bold and authoritative. They use threats to force students to elect them into leadership positions.

Youths are easily lured into cults as a result of bad association or company, fear, dangerous rumour, poor upbringing, poverty, frustration, broken home.

Cult members hardly pay attention to their studies, as they are fond of cajoling their lecturers into passing them in examinations whether they have done well or not.

Proper moral upbringing of children and wards by parents and guardians is recommended as a remedy to cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The youth should be properly counselled on peer group relationship. An innocent child can easily be transformed into a dangerous fearful young man if he is allowed to make friends indiscriminately.

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination malpractice is any act of omission or commission, which compromises the validity and integrity of any examination (Ministry of Education, Benue State, 2001). Malpractice refers to counter practice that is against ethics of examination. It is an act of disrespect to all rules and regulations guiding the good conduct of any examination or any evaluation process.

In recent times, examination malpractice has gone from simple 'giraffing' where students occasionally strain their necks to catch glimpse of what they want to copy from other student's scripts to a variety of sophisticated methods. Some candidates write relevant information on the subject or course to be taken on different objects or parts of the body or even clothes and recopy same during examinations. Some students smuggle in lecture notes from where they copy while others exchange their question papers with answers jotted on them during examination. Some students even hire other more brilliant ones to write examinations for them.

There are many causes of examination malpractice in Nigeria but only a few shall be mentioned here for lack of space. One of the major causes of examination malpractice can be attributed to moral decadence in Nigeria. For some reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, Nigeria has a deplorable value system. One finds that cheating, dishonesty including embezzlement and stealing of public funds and property do not attract the condemnation and punishment they deserve. The emphasis on paper qualification or certificate is another cause of examination malpractice. If admissions to schools and employment of graduates are based on actual performance of candidates during interviews or entrance examinations rather than on mere certificates, examination malpractice shall be discouraged or minimized. Another major cause of examination malpractice is inadequate teaching and learning facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories and even teachers compared

to the population of students. Thus, effective conduct of examination becomes difficult.

Other students' vices such as cultism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and truancy are also encouraging examination malpractice on our campuses as students devote more time to them than their studies.

Examination malpractice has grave consequences on the individuals and institutions of learning, communities and the country as a whole. Dismissal, termination, loss of position and self-confidence as a result of examination malpractice has brought much embarrassment and suffering to individuals, families and communities. The guilty ones who are not caught and punished cannot defend their certificates issued to them. Such people are usually expelled after gaining admission for further studies but cannot cope. Such people if employed, cannot perform their expected duties and may eventually lose their jobs.

In order to curb the problem of examination malpractice in our tertiary institutions, admission of students should not be based only on previous results or certificates but on performance in entrance examinations. In other words, entrance examination to higher institutions of learning should be conducted for those with required minimum entry qualifications. Adequate facilities such as classrooms or lecture halls and laboratories should be provided to ensure effective check and control of candidates during examinations.

Any number of candidates that may be caught and found guilty of the crime of examination malpractice should be punished severely to serve as deterrent to others. The widely held notion by most people that all institutions of learning in Nigeria are involved in examination malpractice and so there is no need to be so rigid about it should be discarded. The special military tribunal on miscellaneous offences decree No. 20 of 1984 stipulated 21-year jail term for anybody convicted of examination malpractice. Culprits of examination malpractice should therefore not just be expelled from our institutions but tried and jailed to serve as deterrent to others.

DRUG ABUSE

A drug, according to Olatunde (1979), is a substance of biological or chemical origin which when applied to a living tissue, produces an effect. Drugs include what are commonly called medicine

and not only substances which, alter mood, perception or normal awareness as some people erroneously believe. Over 350 thousand substances have been employed as drugs and about one thousand are in regular use (Igbokwe, 1997).

Drug abuse refers to the use, especially by self-administration, of any drug in a manner that deviates from an approved medical or social patterns within a given culture (Jaffe, 1975). Government agencies refer to any use of an illicit substance as drug abuse e.g. opioids, heroine, marijuana (Indian hemp). It is interesting to note that the use of medically prescribed opiod analgesics for the relief of pain is quite proper but self-administration of the same drug in same dosages for relief of depression or tension or to induce euphoria is considered flagrant abuse.

Generally, there are certain drugs, which users, including adolescents, become easily addicted to and therefore abuse a lot. These are mostly (i) central Nervous system stimulants (ii) Central Nervous system Depressants (iii) Hallucinage (iv) Narcotic analgesics (v) alcohol and (vi) tobacco.

While central nervous system stimulants such as amphetamine and caffeine speed up people's reactions and counteract fatigue, the depressants calm down people and relieve anxieties. Examples of depressants include phenobarbitone and Valium. Hallucinogens (e.g. cocaine, marijuana) are some of the symptoms of psychosis such as hallucination (appearing to see things not present) and diminished contact with reality. Alcohol, though a social drug, when taken in excess causes undesirable effects on individuals personal judgement and social relationships.

Tobacco is a stimulant that increases mental alertness and in high doses causes unsteadiness and muscle tremors. Narcotic analgesics such as morphine, heroine and opium are pain relievers with marked effect on mood of people.

The causes of drug abuse among students are not too different from those for adults. Bell (1970) notes that drug abuse has many causes viz: cultural, social, economical, psychological and family pathology. These causes include drug abuse through ignorance; deliberate drug abuse, drug abuse for pleasure; drug abuse from curiosity; incorrect drug dosage; drug habit and addiction; home, school or work environment; personal feeling of inadequacy; and membership of group/peer pressure.

Some of the above causes are of particular interest to the educationist. For instance, it has

been shown that most of the students who take drugs to aid them with their studies are those with poor educational records to start with, and sometimes also have a history of instability and family social problems. Similarly, students in particular may engage in drug abuse due to group/peer pressure and the need to belong and be accepted by groups of which they are members.

Although drugs have very important beneficial effects to man, when abused they lead to a lot of undesirable consequences on the individual as well as on the society. Some of the social effects of drug abuse on students include wastage of money/resource; lack of concentration in studies; violent crimes such as fighting, rape, suicide, murder etc; and physical and psychosomatic disorders/diseases.

Judging from the numerous causes and effects of drug abuse, it is not easy to prescribe exact solutions to the problem especially among adolescents who quickly change a lot in behaviour. However, the fight should be carried out in two main fronts namely (i) The family and (ii) Education and public enlightenment.

Various reports about the factors associated with drug abuse suggest that parents have a primary role to play in reducing its incidence. Parents should ensure adequate supervision and control of children to inculcate good value systems in them.

The need for education and public enlightenment of parents, students and general public cannot be overemphasized. Education about the dangers of drug abuse should be provided by parents, teachers, traditional rulers, religious leaders and through the mass media.

SEXUAL PROMISCUITY

Sexual promiscuity among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is another serious vice that calls for serious concern. Most of the students who for the first time, gain some social freedom from their parents' watchful eyes and guidance easily fall prey to the temptation of tasting the forbidden fruit. Some of them become so wild on the illicit lovemaking that they give most of their time and attention to it to the detriment of their studies. They become so much engaged in nocturnal activities that they sleep throughout the daytime in hostels or during lectures for those who would want to register their presence in classes. Some other ones completely abandon their lectures to keep appointments with boy-friends or "sugar daddies".

Sexual promiscuity could lead to unwanted pregnancy, babies or even pre-mature death. In an attempt to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy, complications may result which may lead to hospitalization and absence from lectures for those who may survive. How can such students meet the required educational standards?

Some of the students are so morally bankrupt that they rely absolutely on their womanhood to "pass" their examinations. They seduce fellow male students or examiners to assist them write their examinations or award them pass marks as the case may be.

OBSCENE DRESSING

Tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria have been bedeviled with obscene dressing particularly by female students. Most girls go bare, display their navels and boobs and wearing what are just ample cleavages on display, depicting size and shape of the private parts with minis that barely skim the bottom. It appears now that to be fashionable, one has to become half nude, dressed in sleeveless/see-through tops without bra. According to Irtwange (2004), this constitutes Weapons of Mass Distraction (WMD) and sexual harassment. This seductive dressing thus has profound negative effect on both the students and the lecturers alike as they can hardly concentrate in their academic work under such an environment.

There must be a moderate position that allows the students to dress in a certain way that would meet societal value. The higher institutions of learning have been fighting against other social vices such as cultism, examination malpractice, and drug abuse but the issue of obscene dressing has not received comparable attention.

Some professions have dress codes e.g. law and medical students. Other professions can follow suit. In alternative, a general dress code can be introduced in each higher institution of learning. Such a code shall make provision for lecturers to insist that their students must be decently dressed or be sent out of class.

Parents and religious organizations also have a big role to play in curbing this menace through appropriate upbringing and counselling.

CONCLUSION

The general increase in the social vices among students of higher institutions in Nigeria might be responsible for the general decline in the

quality of the graduates being turned out by these institutions as the trends are moving in opposite direction. An evaluation of the quality of graduates from Nigerian tertiary institutions based mainly on a series of questions put to major employers of Nigerian graduates was carried out to assess graduates' level of preparation and performance on the job. The most worrisome response from these interviews is just how serious quality of the graduates is deteriorating. Employers widely agreed on quality decline in higher education (The Scholar, 2001).

Beyond their general agreement regarding falling standards of higher education, many employers cited key skill areas as particularly worrying. Two of these skills were communication and technical proficiency. Poor abilities in the oral and written expression of English were mentioned almost like a chorus. Graduates were also reported incapable of technical solutions to routine problems as expected of individuals with their levels of training.

The responsibility of preventing or curbing general students vices in our tertiary institutions should be a collective one resting on parents, teachers, religious leaders, authorities of the institutions as well as government.

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