PROMOTING SPORTS ACTIVITIES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A STRATEGY FOR CURBING CULTISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper posits that cult activities in Nigeria university system have almost attained an epidemic proportion. It emphasizes that our universities for the past two decades have been rift with poor social climate feted with cultism. It attributes prevalence of cultism to stressful academic environment under which students learn. It observes that the impacts of cult activities on our educational system are destructive. The danger of cult activities is multi dimensional, which ranges from widespread miscreant behaviors found among our youths, the increasing decline in our standard of education to other socioeconomic consequences cultism leash on the wider society. It upholds that encouraging sports participation has a propensity in building mental alertness. Sports participation helps in training and building the physical body and also the mind towards acquiring positive creative thinking habits. Acquisition of sound mind helps an individual to be able to deal positively with academic stress and pressure. Ability to handle stress related problems such as academic rigors can minimize students’ vulnerability to joining secret cult. It blames university administrators for failing to recognize the potentialities of sports in controlling deviant behaviours such as in cultism. This discourse, therefore, blames university management for encouraging sports apathy. It stresses the potency of using sports promotion to bridge the existing disconnects between psychological growth and academic growth of students. It encourages the use of sports as a tool for building desirable behaviour towards life, which can have positive effect towards learning. It proffers among others, that improving and integrating sports activities in the extra-curricular can serve as an alternative strategy for inspiring students and stimulating them to perform better in their academic pursuits thereby reducing their indulgence in miscreant behaviours such as engaging in cult activities.

The invasion of culture of cultism in our educational system has become a worrisome development particularly in the last two decades. Frequent cult activities are gradually turning our campuses into unsafe ground for effective learning. Deviant acts and other anti-social behaviours are frequently displayed by cult members. Our youths and their activities are threats to normal academic activities. What we now find are
students with harmful and criminal minded vision and mission. Describing the state of cultism in our universities, Ogidefa (2008) reveals that from University of Ibadan through University of Maiduguri, and down to Port Harcourt cultists “were holding sway, the length and breath of the nation and seemingly holding the nation under siege of cultism”. There is virtually any higher institution in Nigeria that can boast of cult free environment or has not experienced the menace of cultism

Contrary to the present harmful activities of cultism, the history of cultism originally was traceable to the formation of pirate confraternity at the University of Ibadan in the 50’s. The original group of cultists consisted mainly of lobbying group with noble ideas (Akpabio, 2003). But as time went on there was erosion on the former objective of cultism as well as its constituents, from the former objective of harmless social association into what one may refer to as a plague. Today’s cultism has taken a new dimension, characterized by social vices and students’ nonchalant attitudes towards academic programmes.

The current trend on cultism is of great concern and worrisome to all particularly to education stakeholders. The presence of cult activities has made our campuses unsafe and our universities continue to witness disruptive academic activities. Incessant cases of cultists plague our universities. Lectures and other school activities get disrupted every time cult members strike violence on campus. The effects of cultism on learning process cannot be exhausted as both intra and inter-cult clashes negatively affect students in stupendous proportion. The intensity and impact of cult activities on lives and property are alarming. Staff and students’ lives are constantly under threat. Cult clashes lead to an outburst of violence on the campus which leaves many students wounded, maimed or killed as the case may be. It some times leads to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent and guilty students. Some cult clashes are so catastrophic that loss of infrastructure and other resources will be colossal and funds that will be used to provide other needs are diverted for replacement of lost properties.

The enormity of problems that cultism exacerbate on schools life draws serious concern to school administrators as well. The concomitant result of the waste of life and capital triggers dares need to finding a lasting solution to this menace. Apparently the problems of secrete cults on our campus are many and complex, but workable solutions are few. The relevant question here is what induces violence on cult members? Nwoye (2002) identifies cultism as being synonymous with the use of violence. Violence has negative effects and is often detrimental to opposing groups and outsiders. Odili (2002) also contends that violence adversely affects students’ academic performance. Deng, (1980) and Mou, (1981) attribute the cause of students’ violence on campus to poor academic, administrative, psychological, political and personal-social problems. This assumption suggests that academic, administrative and psychological problems have inducing factors towards violence. Hostility and disturbance or agitations are all ingredients of comatose situation. It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to identify cause and effects of cultism, as well as promoting sports in Nigeria universities
as an alternative way to redirect students’ energy towards capacity building. This is the crux of this discourse!

**Concepts of Cultism and Sports**

Secret cult could be defined as a set of practices, belief system of idea whose essence is known only to the inner members and excessively admired. Believers defend their existence and activities even to the point of laying down their lives for their course. Chambers 21st century Dictionary (1999) in Ogidefa (2008) describes cult as a system of religious worship that is expressed in rituals. Alobo in Orukpe (1998: 11) defines secret cult as a “group of people who share in propagating peculiar but secret beliefs divulged only to the members”. Tijani (2005) in Ogidefa (2008) and Ekwunife (2005) state that cultism is an assemblage of people who share ideas and beliefs and involve themselves in eccentric conduct and manifestations mostly shrouded in secrecy. These definitions confirm that cultism is an organized and systematic form of organization bounded by secret confines. Members engage in concerted hidden activities. Hidden activities and nocturnal meetings characterize the lifestyle of cultism. It is remarkable to note therefore that cult and its activities are run under secrecy. Activities that are performed in secrets cannot be exclusively devoid of doubts of motives. In summary cultism describes people who are involved in ritual practice whose modus of operandi are exclusively secretive devoid of public consumption. Their activities are generally unhealthy to non-members.

Sports on the other hand are described as organized game that not only attracts rewards. Sports help an individual to keep fit and imbibe positive values that can help him/her deal with stressful moments. A wide spectrum of outcomes has been attributed to sports and play. Critics have condemned sports for fostering excessive, an overemphasis on competition and winning, and the exploitation of individuals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982). Sports proponents have extolled the value of sports as a contributor to health, personal fulfillment, and community integration (Wankel and Berger, 1990). Sports can therefore be an effective safety valve for letting off excessive energies, which ordinarily could have been mischievously channeled towards acts of indiscipline.

Sports therefore have remained a powerful tool for producing positive outcomes and character formation. Csikszentmihalyi (1982) proposed the benefits of sports at individual level as capable of providing personal enjoyment and personal growth while at the community level; sports provide social harmony and integration. Sports according to him also provide social growth and change. Wankel and Kriesel (1985) expanded on this stating that the benefits of sports encompass experiencing the benefit of personal enjoyment, personal accomplishment, and excitement of the sports. Improving one’s sports skills, testing one’s skills against others among others. The benefits of sports activities have positive influence on outcomes and can deter negative energies in cultism if well managed. In another development, Greendorfer (1978) posits that sports foster friendship between sexes which can bridge gender gap and other forms of discriminations. However, observation indicates that different sports appeal to different
social stratifications and may reinforce gender difference. This notwithstanding, sports activities and participation encourage positive character formation and discipline in the participants.

**Pattern of Cult Activities**

Our campuses are gradually losing their academic excellence. Dramatic trend of violence and other anti-social behaviours are in constant occurrence in our university institutions. The solid existence of cult groups within the university community has completely made life unsafe and meaningless for both staff and students as even female students who refuse the amorous advances of cult members are disdainfully manhandled. Our universities are turning into arena for breeding gangsters and hooligans who shun proper academic activities. Cult members leash terror to human lives and properties in and outside university environment.

Cult members indulge in gross indiscipline, intolerance and insubordination to school authorities. Violent assaults on teachers, fellow students, gang warfare, extortion and high incidence of sexual violence against female students characterize their activities. Cultism has become a dreadful instrument for striking terror in the institutions and even in communities resulting in untimely killings, intimidation, maiming of people. They often offer themselves as available tools for political tugs during election campaigns.

**Problems of Cultism in Nigeria Universities**

The fact remains that many universities in Nigeria are berated because of widespread activities of cultists. Nigeria educational institutions are beset by many kinds of cancerous problems like cultism. Cultists involve in several anti-social activities which continue to threaten the essence of teaching and learning Lives and properties are at stake. Constant cult activities and its havoc have presented a general feeling of doubts in the quality of education.

The problems of cultists have resulted to a general feeling of apathy towards university education. There is hardly any academic session without reported cases of cultism in most Nigerian institutions. Perhaps another reason for apathy towards schooling may be as a result of high rate of unemployment. Apparently, such students are no longer in a hurry to graduate. They may prefer to remain in school and exercise their power. Nigerian society cannot but generate recourse to cultism. The negative impact of the toxic environment where knowledge seem to have been devalued and material wealth (regardless of how it is achieved) is seen as the be-all-and-end-all, students’ morale has generated anger, frustration and disillusionment towards education. Specifically the factors that contribute to cultism in our campuses are as follows:

(a) **Crisis in Educational Sector:** University education is regarded conventionally as the bedrock and an indispensable tool for national development. Contrary to this assertion, our universities have become a haven for breeding misfits. Crisis
in educational sector generated by decay in social infrastructure, poor funding and frequent strikes are said to have implications to the sudden increase or upsurge in campus cult activities. The frustration and destroying belief generated by these unfavorable conditions operating in our higher institutions have led to greater menace or danger of cult activities on campuses. This explains Haralambos and Horton (2004) preposition that students’ way of dealing with school life depend upon whether they accept or reject the aim of academic successes (which is predicated upon the school climate) as it were. Lending support, Eke (2002) remarks that deviant acts by students have soared high that the resultant indiscipline has culminated in misconduct of various degrees.

(b) Struggle for Power and Social Recognition: The struggle for power and social recognition among students has aggravated the quest for sources of maintaining power. Ekwunife (2000) contends that power tussle in higher institutions are powerful environmental factors in promoting cultism. Such tussle to gain or maintain power can generate latent conflict among opposing camps. Violence occurs when there is a protracted hostility between students or and university management. Sometimes, such conflict manifests in form of violence where lives are lost and property destroyed. Ikeh (1998) observes also that students join secrete cults as an avenue for securing girl friends. He further maintains that another reason for students’ interest in joining cults is for monetary values since members see one another as members of the same family. For instance, the part of money extorted from non-members is used to assist members who are not financially disposed.

(c) Academic Frustration and feeling of Insecurity: Cultism has been discussed as a cause of rampant breakdown of social order and feeling of discontent among students. The present learning environment is stressful and tends to weaken academic growth. Poor learning conditions encourage students agitated and restless. Maladjustment to academic rigors and inadequate commitment to excel in their academic pursuits create leverage to susceptibility to cultism. Such conditions ignite stress, frustration and uneasiness on students, which are pre-requisites to students susceptibility to joining secrete and clandestine organizations on campus. Such outlets tend though often bedeviled with anti-social activities such as in cultism, provide them with an alternative sense of belonging which the school has failed to provide.

(d) Influence of the Wider Society: Our society seems to be ridden with nefarious activities such as violent murder, rituals and spiritual powers and manipulations as a result of prevalence of secrete societies. Ekwunife (2000) posits that there are high cases of deviant activities among youths because of the prevailing socio-cultural and economic situation in the country. The atmosphere of intimidation that seems to pervade our society informs what is expected of our
youths in or outside the school environment. At the same time, Akpabio (2003) confirms that present of secret cults in the tertiary institutions is an extension of the impact of secrete societies existing in our country such as Ogboni fraternity, lodge and so on. Thus the “excitement” of violent murder, ritual and spiritual powers associated with secrete society in the wider society appears to have direct influence on the existence of campus cult.

Effects of Cultism
Qualitative education has continued to suffer as a result of the activities of cultism. The problem of cultism and other incessant irresponsible behaviours found among students have negative consequences on both academic activities and social stability of our society. Some factors are discussed below.

-Decline in Students’ Academic Performance and Achievement: There is a strong indication that a relationship exists between education and cultural environment. Thompson (2000) in Ogidefa (2008) and Imogie (2002) in Ogidefa (2008) contend that the success of educational achievement is dependent on an existing societal culture. Differently put, the achievement in education of any nation depends on the cultural climate which governs that environment. Academic excellence can only tread in a conducive social environment. On the contrary, cultism has endangered effective teaching and learning exerting pressure on over all performance academic performance of students. Cultism is a product of indiscipline.

-Loss of Personality Identity: Cultism has implications students’ loss of personal identity. Loss of identity encourages loss of purpose and sense of direction. This leads to a complete loss of interest in quality education. The sudden change in his life style predisposes him to other anti- social behaviours such as stealing and other destructive tendencies.

-Influence on the Wider Society: The existence of cultism in our universities has adverse effect on social stability of both in and outside our campuses. It has generated increasing pace in socio-mural devalues. Cultism impacts on our younger youths who try to copy the older ones. They easily get initiated. Children are often swayed into joining the older folks. Cultism has direct effect on widespread cases of sexual harassment and abuse as well as gang rape.

Reasons for Students’ Poor Participation in Sports Activities
The role of sports in ensuring overall wellbeing, fitness, relaxation, tension release cannot be overemphasized. However, certain factors tend to inhibit students’ participation in sports while in school. There discussed under the following sub-heading:

- Lack of Proper Orientation: The state of sports in our lower levels of education has a contributing effect on lack of interest in sports activities even at the higher level of education. Schools fail to promote acquisition of basic
knowledge and skills in different motor activities at the lower levels. With low morale at the lower levels students do not find sporting activities interesting at their higher level of education.

- **Poor Perception of Sports in Schools:** It seems a great number of school administrators are ignorant of the value of sports. As a result planning of sport programmes is a waste of time to them. In schools where sport facilities are found, staff and students alike are ignorant of the potentials of sports.

- **Poor Recognition of Sports Activities in the Wider Society:** There is generally a reasonable measure of social apathy towards sporting activities. It appears that the only sport that is widely recognized in our society is football probably because of the amount of wealth it attracts. Lack of recognition and support from parents and administrators culminate into initial inhibition towards students’ involvement and interest in sports activities.

**Using Sports Activities and Promotion as Solution to Cultism**

Sports serve positive influence on emotional and psychological stability. Therefore using sports to replace irresponsible life pattern can serve a corrective measure for curbing cultism. Some of the

- **Effective Tool for Building Stable Character Formation:** Increasing sports participations among students should be encouraged. It will help to reduce high incidence of cult activities in our campuses by channeling their mind and energy to a more productive activity. Restiveness and youthful exuberance are emotional traits commonly found among young adults, which need to be properly guided. Planning sports programmes in our universities as well as building and maintaining adequate sports facilities, equipments and personnel are sure ways of creating relaxations and controlling academic stress. Sports promotion can become an ante dote for helping agitated and restless students cope with behavioural problem.

- **Potentaility of Sports in Controlling Deviant Acts:** It appears that a considerable proportion of deviant activities arise from wrongful use of leisure time by students. Omorun (1996) sees sports as an organized game, in which there are sanctions. He further posits that these sanctions help participants to learn to accept defeat without leading into violence. Sporting activities if well managed can help in creating healthy and happy people. This also has implications to increased productivity. School management should encourage students’ participation in sport activities by not only providing facilities and equipment but also through awarding outstanding students in sporting activities with funds for external competitions. With such involvements and incentives more students could be motivated. Students’ energies and drives are equally channeled towards worthwhile activities.

Uzoma Aja-Okorie, (Ph.D)
- **Formation of Sports Clubs as a Means of Fostering Friendship**: Promotion of team spirits and healthy competition among students can be increased through the formation of different sports clubs. Building of team spirit and understanding of how to deal with each others’ differences can be enhanced in this way. Sports may act as a means of transmitting societal values which leads many authorities to believe that sport has positive value in building character and strong work ethic.

**The Way Forward**

- There should be adequate funding and proper management of sports. The school authority needs to improve on funding of sports activities and promotion in our universities. Ability to adequately integrate sports activities in our schools will enhance participation and replacement of old habits. There should an improvement on current sports structures in our universities. New ones need to be built with necessary facilities and manpower required to upgrade sports activities.

- Creating gender friendly environment for sports participation needs to be well articulated. The problem of apathy will be overcome when sports and environment become gender friendly. Gender mainstreaming of sports activities and participation among students needs to be encouraged such as in creating variety of sports and providing adequate facilities for practice.

- Boosting networks for national and international participations with other universities. Such interactions will ensure networking and friendliness among the youths. In this manner anger management strategies are learned and practice.

- By creating healthy environment through sports participation students are encouraged to develop physically, mentally and socially. Through such mechanism youths learn to live more happily as healthy-minded citizens in their personal lives.

- School-health fitness programmes for sports activities such as in endurance fitness are necessary to enable students acquire and develop worthy values instead of old habits of negative values.

**Conclusion**

The acts of deviance such as cultism, rape, disobedience, hooliganism and all other miscreant behaviours have unfortunately assumed an unprecedented dimension in Nigerian universities. This development has rendered the school environment unsafe for normal academic activities. This unhealthy development in the schools as a result of the deviant activities of students has a spill over effects on the wider society. The incidences of cultic activities and its effects in and outside the university campuses are of great concern to not only school authorities but also the generality of the public. Properly
planned and administered physical education and sports activities alike would provide opportunities for students to fully participate in wholesome sports. It is strongly believed that students’ participation in holistic sports activities will provide the much needed opportunities for character molding and shun to all anti-social behaviours that currently characterize our university system.

References


