



## Public Awareness and Disciplinary Approaches to Managing Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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### Abstract

This study examines the perspectives of staff and students on the effectiveness of school disciplinary measures and public awareness campaigns in addressing cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. To direct the study, two hypotheses were examined using the t-test statistical analysis. 740 professors and 740 students who were chosen at random from universities in the states of Edo, Anambra, Ondo, Kwara, and Kano provided the data. The data was collected using a validated 10-item questionnaire. Staff and students' opinions of the efficacy of public awareness campaign tactics, including public lectures, symposiums, seminars, workshops, posters, handbills, and the use of print and electronic media, in combating cultism did not significantly vary, according to the results. Their opinions on the use of disciplinary actions, such as expulsion, suspension, and withdrawal, in dealing with cultism, however, differed significantly. These results led to the provision of useful advice.

**Keywords:** Public Awareness, Cultism, Campaign Strategies, Tertiary Institutions, Disciplinary Approaches,

### Introduction

The critical role of educational institutions in addressing the pervasive issue of cultism cannot be overstated. Adebayo and Chukwuma (2021) argue that students who experience academic frustration are more likely to engage in misconduct compared to those who achieve success in their studies. Repressive institutional policies and an unhealthy school environment often exacerbate indiscipline, fostering behaviours that undermine the educational process. It is essential to recognise that the classroom atmosphere created by teachers significantly impacts student interactions and overall behaviour. Okafor and Nwankwo (2020) emphasize that effective communication within schools is crucial for fostering collective involvement in institutional activities. Transparent communication channels ensure that staff and students remain informed about school affairs, creating a sense of inclusion. Failure to promote such involvement can result in widespread misconduct and moral decline. With cultism deeply entrenched in many Nigerian tertiary institutions, school administrators have implemented various measures to curb its spread. The Federal Ministry of Education (2022) highlights the importance of education in promoting core values such as respect for human dignity, rational decision-making, moral and spiritual integrity, and shared responsibility for societal well-being. This underscores the belief that a sound educational system must prioritize moral and ethical development alongside academic achievement.

To tackle cultism, schools often employ strategies ranging from warnings to severe disciplinary actions such as suspension or expulsion. However, despite these measures, cultism continues to thrive across many institutions. Public awareness campaigns have been employed to highlight the dangers of cultism, utilizing various media platforms to educate and inform the public. While these campaigns have achieved some success, their impact remains inconsistent and often falls short of expectations. Upon admission to tertiary institutions, students with inclinations toward cultism actively seek opportunities to join such groups. Some are coerced into participation,

especially those from affluent backgrounds, while others join due to social or academic challenges. Conversely, a number of students remain wary of cultism and avoid any association with it. Orientation programs, often featuring public enlightenment campaigns, play a vital role in educating new students about the dangers of cultism. These programs may include testimonials from former cult members, dramatic reenactments, informational leaflets, and magazines that expose the harmful activities associated with cultism. Many universities and tertiary institutions adopt these preventive strategies to address cultism. Disciplinary committees are frequently established to handle cases of misconduct, and orientation programs are organized to promote awareness and instill anti-cultism values. While these efforts are commendable, the persistence of cultism underscores the need for more innovative and comprehensive approaches to effectively address this menace.

### **Public Awareness Campaign Strategy**

This study aims to examine the perceptions of staff and students regarding two critical strategies public awareness campaigns and school disciplinary measures designed to combat cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. By assessing the effectiveness and acceptance of these approaches, the study seeks to determine their role in curbing cultism on campuses. Public awareness campaigns are widely recognized as essential in managing the issue of cultism. According to recent research, the rise of cultism in Nigerian institutions can be attributed to deeper societal issues such as moral decay, materialism, and an unchecked thirst for power (Odeyemi & Bakare, 2023). Soyinka (2020) reaffirms that the larger society, not just students, must bear the responsibility for this epidemic. Cultism cannot be eradicated unless society as a whole is properly educated and reoriented. Accordingly, the NERDC (2022), under the directive of the National Council on Education, continues to engage in nationwide research and interventions aimed at curbing cultism in schools. Recent pilot studies in FCT and Lagos have focused on value-based education, character reformation, and psychosocial support for at-risk students (NERDC, 2023). Furthermore, a national anti-cultism workshop hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Orientation Agency in Abuja in 2021 emphasized public awareness, legislation, and school-community partnerships (NOA & FME, 2021). Similarly, the University of Lagos and the MacArthur Foundation co-hosted a seminar on youth violence and cultism in higher institutions, focusing on student leadership and civic responsibility (Ibrahim & Adebayo, 2022).

Public awareness initiatives have proven to be powerful tools for exposing the dangers of cultism. These include seminars, workshops, symposiums, posters, handbills, jingles, and public lectures. Adebisi (2020) highlights the role of the media and digital platforms in uncovering secret cult activities and educating the public. This aligns with the views of criminologists like Ejiofor (2021), who assert that addressing the root causes of crime through civic education is essential for prevention. Ajayi and Uchenna (2022) advocate that anti-cultism messages should be integrated into matriculation speeches, convocation addresses, and regular classroom dialogue. This echoes sentiments from Ogundele (2023), who noted that transparency and dialogue are effective tools for de-escalating cult influence in tertiary institutions. Open discussions about cultism play a pivotal role in dismantling its mystique and addressing its harmful impact. Bamidele and Yusuf (2021) emphasize that encouraging open discourse allows students to speak out, enabling authorities to gain crucial intelligence. At the University of Lagos, a recent play titled *The Mask Behind the Face* by a student dramatist was used during orientation to deter cult recruitment. Creative initiatives like this, including films and public performances, are increasingly being adopted as effective tools for youth engagement (Fabiya, 2022).

### **School Disciplinary Measures**

School disciplinary actions, such as rustication, expulsion, and withdrawal, are commonly implemented in efforts to control cultism within academic institutions. However, these measures have faced significant criticism over time. Onifade and Adesina (2020) argue that merely setting up committees without following through with their recommendations does little to deter cult activity. Expulsion policies, though widely adopted, are often

circumvented. Some students re-enter the system through backdoor admissions or under false identities, frustrating efforts to curb cultism (Chukwudi & Balogun, 2021).

A significant challenge faced by institutions is the clandestine nature of cult operations. Members often shield each other, and some faculty or staff with past cult affiliations may hinder disciplinary processes. This creates a compromised environment where justice is obstructed. Ibrahim and Eze (2021) report that the "code of silence" in some institutions has led to violent incidents, including the deaths of staff and students. Additionally, rusticated students sometimes continue to reside on campus, shielded by active cult members. According to Effiong and Nwokocha (2023), unless enforcement is matched with adequate surveillance and community involvement, disciplinary measures will remain ineffective. Some institutions have started implementing auxiliary policies such as restricting night movements, regulating on-campus bars, and partnering with security operatives for intelligence gathering (Oladipo & Ajibola, 2022). While these strategies show promise, the persistence of cultism demands a broader institutional and societal response.

### Statement of Problem

In recent years, Nigerian tertiary institutions have increasingly faced the menace of cultism, which has transformed campuses into breeding grounds for violence and insecurity. Secret cults have turned these institutions into zones of chaos, with reported incidents of nighttime shootings, theft, physical assaults, and sexual violence perpetrated by their members (Ogbonnaya et al., 2023). For students and staff, life on campus has become fraught with fear and anxiety, as discussions about cultism are often conducted in whispers due to the clandestine and nocturnal operations of these groups. Given the gravity of the situation, school administrators are compelled to act decisively. Allowing cult members to dominate campuses and disrupt the academic environment is not an option. As such, two primary strategies are employed to combat cultism: disciplinary measures and public awareness campaigns. Disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, expulsions, and the establishment of anti-cult committees, aim to enforce order and accountability. At the same time, public awareness campaigns use workshops, seminars, social media platforms, and other outreach methods to educate students and staff on the dangers of cultism (Adesina & Bello, 2022). The success of these strategies depends significantly on the perceptions and cooperation of both staff and students. While administrators strive to implement these measures effectively, a critical question remains: do staff and students view these strategies in the same light? Recent studies, such as those by Eze and Nwosu (2021), suggest that discrepancies in perception can undermine the effectiveness of anti-cultism initiatives. Understanding and addressing these differences are crucial for fostering a unified approach to tackling the issue. Ultimately, combating cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions requires collaborative effort, sustained awareness, and firm disciplinary policies. By engaging all stakeholders and continually refining these strategies, campuses can become safer and more conducive to learning and development.

### Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of staff and students regarding the effectiveness of school disciplinary measures and public awareness campaign strategies in managing cultism within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Specifically, the study aims to:

- 1) Assess the perceptions of staff and students concerning the application of school disciplinary measures in addressing cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
- 2) Determine the perceptions of staff and students regarding the use of public awareness campaign strategies in managing cultism within Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### Hypotheses

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the perceptions of staff and students regarding the use of public awareness campaign strategies in managing cultism in higher institutions.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the perceptions of staff and students concerning the school disciplinary measures implemented to address cultism.

## Methodology

This study uses a survey research approach to investigate how staff and students at Nigerian higher education institutions perceive the employment of disciplinary actions and public education programs to combat cultism. Using a straightforward random sample technique, 740 employees and 740 students were chosen at random from higher education institutions in the states of Edo, Anambra, Ondo, Kwara, and Kano. The Cult Management Strategy (CMS) questionnaire was created by the researcher. Twenty questions in part B of the questionnaire were in line with the two research hypotheses, whereas the first part collected demographic data about the respondents. Experts in sociology and school administration from Niger Delta University on Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, examined and approved the questionnaire. The instrument's reliability was evaluated using a test-retest methodology with 20 respondents who were not included in the primary sample. With a dependability value of 0.85, the device was deemed dependable for gathering data. Since the surveys were gathered right away, a 100% return rate was guaranteed by the researcher and study assistants who administered them. The t-test statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the data.

## Results

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference between staff and student perceptions of the use of public awareness campaign strategies in managing cultism in higher institutions.

Items 1-5 in the *Cult Management Strategy* (CMS) questionnaire were designed to gather information from respondents regarding their perceptions of public awareness efforts, including public lectures, seminars, and other campaign strategies aimed at addressing cultism in tertiary institutions.

**Table 1: Staff and students perceptions of the use of the public awareness campaign strategies as a cult.**

Group	N	Mean	S	DF	t-value	t-critical
Staff	740	12.70	1.76	1479	-0.31	1.96
Students	740	12.09	1.84			

\* Significant at 0.05

A total of 740 randomly chosen students and 740 staff members made up the study's sample size. Based on staff and student replies on items 1–5 of the graded questionnaire, the mean scores were 12.70 and 12.09, respectively. With a degree of freedom (df) of 1,479, the computed standard deviations for staff and students were 1.76 and 1.84, respectively. -0.31 was the computed t-value. The null hypothesis, which contends that there is no discernible difference between staff and students' opinions of the efficacy of public awareness campaign tactics, cannot be rejected because the calculated t-value of -0.31 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 (as shown in Table I).

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the perceptions of staff and students about school disciplinary measures used to combat cultism.

Items 5-10 in the questionnaire addressed the effectiveness of various school disciplinary actions such as expulsion, rustication, withdrawal, ejection from halls of residence, and movement restrictions in managing cultism. The responses to these items were analyzed using t-test statistics to test this hypothesis.

**Table 2: Staff and Students' Perceptions of the Use of the various school disciplinary measures adopted to combat cultism.**

Group	N	Mean	S	DF	t-value	t-critical
Staff	740	11.73	10.56	1479	10.42	1.96
Students	740	6.83	7.14			

\* Significant at 0.05

740 randomly chosen staff members and 740 pupils made up the study's total sample size. The faculty and students had mean scores of 11.73 and 6.83, respectively. Staff and students had standard deviations of 10.56 and 7.14, respectively. The computed t-value, with a degree of freedom (df) of 1,479, was 10.42. The null hypothesis is rejected since the calculated t-value of 10.42 is greater than the crucial t-value of 1.96 (as shown in Table 2). This suggests that staff and students have somewhat different opinions on the use of school disciplinary actions to fight cultism

### Discussion

The public awareness campaign strategy plays a crucial role in combating the spread of cultism in higher education institutions. This strategy involves a range of activities such as public lectures, seminars, open symposiums, poster displays, and active engagement with both print and electronic media to highlight the dangers and consequences of cultism. According to the staff and students surveyed, the use of such public awareness campaigns, which focus on exposing the harmful effects of cultism, could significantly discourage students from pursuing membership in such groups. Recent studies emphasize that these campaigns should extend beyond the confines of the school environment to reach parents, community leaders, and policymakers (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2021). Moreover, media practitioners are encouraged to create and air compelling and culturally relevant jingles and documentaries that vividly highlight the personal and societal costs of cultism (Ibrahim & Eze, 2022).

Traditionally, school disciplinary measures have been the primary approach to addressing cultism. When suspected cultists are identified, they are typically brought before the school's disciplinary committee, which may include individuals who are themselves affiliated with cult groups. This committee, after reviewing the case, can impose various penalties, such as expulsion, rustication, withdrawal of studentship, or ejection from the hall of residence. In some cases, they may refer the matter to law enforcement authorities for further action.

However, the findings from hypothesis two reveal a notable difference in the perceptions of staff and students regarding the effectiveness of these disciplinary measures. Many students argue that sanctions like rustication, expulsion, or ejection from campus housing are not effective. Even after being rusticated, students often remain on campus, as some staff members are reluctant to confront them due to fear or negligence. While staff may enforce these measures strictly for record-keeping purposes, students view such efforts as ineffective, especially when the disciplinary panel may have sympathizers or members with ties to cults. Furthermore, expelled students often find their way into other institutions, where they continue to recruit new members, exacerbating the problem. Similarly, when a cultist is evicted from campus housing, they often move off-campus and establish "empire" strongholds, where cult activities continue unchecked. Obah (2006) concurs with the view that traditional school disciplinary measures are inadequate to fully address the growing issue of campus cultism.

### Conclusion

The study reveals a significant alignment between staff and students in terms of their views on the importance and deployment of public awareness efforts to combat cultism in higher education. Both groups agree on the necessity of raising awareness, indicating a shared recognition of the issue's gravity. However, notable differences emerge when it comes to the effectiveness of school disciplinary procedures in addressing cultism. Staff members and students seem to have contrasting perceptions of how well current measures are working, highlighting a potential gap in understanding or expectations between these two groups. This divergence underscores the need for further dialogue and collaborative efforts to refine and enhance the policies and procedures aimed at tackling cultism, ensuring they are both effective and widely accepted across the academic community.

## Recommendations

- 1) Utilize media platforms to create programs and jingles discouraging student involvement in cultism, highlighting its harmful consequences.
- 2) Distribute posters, handbills, and share ex-cultists' experiences to raise awareness of cultism's negative impact on students, staff, and parents.
- 3) Promote public lectures, symposia, and workshops to address and raise awareness of cultism within educational institutions.
- 4) Ensure the school disciplinary committee is composed of individuals with no known ties to cult groups.
- 5) Train college security personnel to effectively detect and address cult-related activities and monitor off-campus locations for potential cult activities.

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