

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES: A VERITABLE WEAPON FOR CURBING SOCIAL VICES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN DELTA STATE

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### Abstract

*The study examines the menace of social vices and their negative impacts on teaching and learning which inhibit positive school climate. Social vices such as cultism, rioting, drug abuse and malpractice have been recurrent issues in Nigerian educational system. Religion is a reliable and potent element for the eradication of social vices due to its ability to impact sound moral values in learners. The study adopts historical approach and highlights many destructive tendencies of these vices in the educational subsector, with particular reference to tertiary institutions. To stem these nefarious acts, the study advances a number of recommendations with emphasis on the entrenchment of religious studies at all levels of education for the enhancement of positive school climate.*

### Introduction

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research. However, this could be inhibited through the menace of social vices in a school environment. Social vices are constraints to positive school climate due to their negative impacts on teaching and learning. Okobia (2013), posits that social vices violate social norms of any organization, school, home and society, and they are forms of behaviour that do not conform to societal norms and values. Therefore, social vices include immoral activities which are likely to become involved in any profitable venture or activities like cultism, malpractice, rioting and drug abuse (Braha, 2012).

According to Owen (2004) School climate is a broad term that relates to teacher and students perception of the work environment of the school, the formal organization,

informal organization, personalities of participants, and organizational leadership that influence it. School climate is relatively the enduring quality of school environment that is experienced by participants affects their behaviour and is based on their collective perception of behaviour in school (Ojikutu, 2013). The description of school climate is imperative since the atmosphere of a school has a major impact in the organizational behaviour and because administrators can have a significant positive influence on the development of the personality of the schools. Thus, a positive school climate is a conducive environment that promotes effective teaching and learning.

Basically, many destructive tendencies of social vices are highlighted alongside the educational sub-sector with particular reference to tertiary institutions. These social vices are deviant behaviours that are exhibited in many forms such as cultism, drug abuse, rioting, examination malpractice and others. They have been recurrent issues in present day societies, and religious studies have significant roles to play in curbing these vices.

Religious studies are indispensable instrument for curbing social vices and promoting positive school climate. The reason is because it has positive influence on the lives of individual and the society at large. Lawal (2002) opines that religion has the capability of developing the intellectual capacity of learners as well as reaching a required physical attainment and moral soundness. This is because morality deals with good character, right or proper conduct. Infact, moral education can be regarded as the process of guiding the character development of an individual in the society in order for an individual to be able to do what is right or just.

### **Concept of Positive School Climate**

Howard, Howell and Brainard (1987) define a School's Climate as its atmosphere for learning. It includes the feelings people have about the school and whether it is a place where learning can occur. A positive climate makes a school a place where both staff and students want to spend a substantial portion of their time; it is a good place to be. According to Pekins (2006) school climate is the social

atmosphere of a setting or "learning environment" in which students have different experiences, depending upon the protocols set up by the teachers and the administrators. Pekins classified learning environment into three categories such as: involvement; affiliation with others in the classroom and teacher support; personal growth or goal orientation, which comprises personal development and self enhancement of all members of the environment; and system maintenance as well as system change, which include the orderliness of the environment, the charity of the rules, and the strictness of the teacher in enforcing the rule.

According to Jump up (2005), religious studies are the academic field of multi-disciplinary, secular study of religious beliefs, behaviours and institutions. It describes compares, interprets and explains religions, emphasizing systematic, historical and cross-cultural perspectives. It also refers to the teaching of religions in general and its varied aspects. It's beliefs, doctrines, rituals, customs, rites and personal roles. It contributes to the development and growth of humanity and the safe keeping of the society.

Nworie (2000) asserts that religious studies teach morality and shapes character. It is a process of guiding characters and development of an individual in the society in order for him/her to be able to do what is right or just. Also, it attempts to teach standard of right or wrong, as well as the application to individual lives Lawal (2002).

A number of social vices have been identified, these include:

**Cultism:** The most crucial problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria is cultism. There is no long existing single institution of higher learning that has not experienced the menace of cultism at one time or the other. Currently, the menace and the aggressiveness of cult members and cult related violent clashes and activities in most tertiary institutions have caused the sudden death of lecturers and students.

Ogunbameru (2004) defines secret cult as any form of organization whose activities are exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but such activities

are carried out at odd hours of the day and they often clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life. Hornby (2006) views cultism as a system of religious worship especially one that is expressed in ritual. In other words, cultism can be regarded as a ritual practice by group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operation are kept secret with the activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike.

A cult comprises initiated members who are clandestine in their activities. Cult activities are usually organised and performed in deep recesses of jungles and caves (Elegbeleye, 2005). There are several reasons why students in tertiary institutions join secret cult. These reasons include, anti social personality disorder, defence mechanism and complexes. Some students also join cult due to involvement of certain lecturers and administration in secret cult. Moreover, un-conducive learning facilities, environment and inadequate welfare programmes as well as inadequate religious and moral instructions can lure students to embracing cult group and cult activities (Abamba, 2011). Cultists are soulless and blood thirsty monsters who lack moral value and do not show any sign of remorse when caught in a nefarious act.

### **Rioting**

According to Glaser (2011) a riot is a form of civil disorder commonly characterised by a group lashing out in a violent public disturbance against authority, property or people. They are usually the result of civil unrest while individuals may attempt to lead or control a riot. Riots typically consist of disorganised groups that are often "chaotic and exhibit hard behaviour". However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that riots are not irrational, herd-like behaviour, but actually follow inverted social norms.

Riots often occur in reaction to a perceived grievance or out of dissent. Riots have occurred due to poor working or living conditions, governmental oppression, taxation or conscription, conflicts between ethnic groups, (race riot) or religions (sectarian violence, program), the outcome of a sporting event (football hooliganism) or frustration without legal channels through which to air grievances (Ballard, 2011).

Riots typically involve vandalism and the destruction of property, public or private. The property targeted varies depending on the riot and the inclinations of those involved. Targets can include shops, cars, restaurants, state-owned institutions and religious building. Student's riots are precipitated by students often in higher education, such as a college or university. Student's riots may also occur as a result of oppression of peaceful demonstration or after sporting events. Students may constitute an active political force in a given country. Such riots may occur in the context of wider political or social grievance.

### **Drug Abuse**

Drug abuse according to Hornby (2006) is a substance one takes especially as a habit for pleasure or excitement. There are soft and hard drugs. Soft drugs are used for relief of physical ailment while the hard drugs are deliberately taken so as to be in a state of euphoria. They are regarded as psychoactive drugs and are under ban in most countries. They are Cocaine, Heroin, Ecstasy, LSD (Lysergic acid diethyl lamide), Opium, and so on. The following drugs are not under ban, but when used illicitly and unconditionally leads to drug abuse among youths. These are categorised as soft drugs: they are marijuana, Tobacco, cigarette, alcohol inhailant (Abamba 2011)

Jenkins (1999) asserts that drug abuse is a patterned use of a substance (drug) in which the user consumes the substance in amounts or with methods which are harmful to themselves or others. The exact cause of substance abuse is impossible to know because there is not just one direct cause. However, substance abuse and addiction is known to run in families. One theory suggests there is a genetic disposition which predisposes certain individuals towards substance abuse. Another suggests that substance abuse is learned. Therefore people subjected to substance abuse by those around them begin to copy the same behaviours. Substance abuse might begin as a bad habit but when addiction develops, it manifests as a chronic debilitating disease.

Anumonya (1980) posits that drug abuse is a chronic compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences to the individual that is addicted and to those

around him. The school system is expected not only to have students who are healthy physically, mentally and psychologically but to make them become better in these aspects as a result of the learning experiences they will be exposed to while in school. If this is to be achieved, then, the school is expected to have drug free students. It has been observed that drug abuse is prevalent not only among tertiary institution students but also among secondary school students who will eventually become the raw materials for tertiary institutions. If they are already addicted at the secondary school level, one can then imagine their level of addiction at the tertiary level of education.

The researcher further stated that users of hard drugs lack self-control and can go to any length to sustain their addiction. Little wonder, some students take to robbery to sustain their habit. Others engage in bizarre actions such as kidnapping of some of their lecturers and their vice chancellors as was witnessed some years ago in Delta state university, Abraka. Stealing and burglary have also become very common and on the increase in schools.

### **Examination Malpractice**

Ikpeba (2011) states that examination malpractice relates to acts, behaviours and attitudes that run contrary to the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of any examination in the school system. Such malpractice can be described as wrong doing, misconduct, dishonesty or improper practice for personal gain. It is a situation in which students seek to pass examinations through illegal ways without applying their reasonable skills. The researcher further reiterates that students are the major actors of examination malpractice. Due to inadequate preparation and peer group influence, many Nigeria students who view knowledge and skill acquisition as unnecessary, resort to examination malpractice as a means of obtaining success in their examination. Again, in company of their friends, students engage in all sorts of crime; social and anti-social activities to the neglect of their studies. Consequently they appear in the examination hall unprepared and with some level of anxiety. Their peers who pass the examinations through malpractice teach the new entrants the tricks they employed for cheating. Such negative peers group influence always lead to indiscipline in schools.

The process of examination in Nigerian schools has become a contemporary shame due to examination malpractice that has become endemic in the educational system. Some of the causes of examination malpractice in Nigerian schools, according to Ivowi (1997) are lack of confidence as a result of inadequate preparation by the students, peer influence, societal influence, parental support and poor facilities in schools. Moreover, some parents aid and abet in examination malpractice by providing their children money to enable them cheat in examination. Thus, fear of the wrath or punishment of parents if they fail examination leads some students to engage in this nefarious act. Besides, inadequate educational materials in the school system can encourage examination malpractice. Most Nigerian schools lack the necessary facilities that can sustain effective and functional education. A recent survey by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2006) has shown that a good number of schools lack conducive school environment for effective teaching and learning.

#### **Effects of Social Vices on Positive School Climate**

The social vices bedeviling the Nigerian society have permeated the entire education sector. The manifestations are, cultism, rioting, drug abuse, examination malpractice and others which have become endemic in the Nigerian educational system. The effects of cultism on the learning process cannot be exhausted as both intra and intercult clashes negatively affect the students in a very high proportion. It sometimes leads to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent students and cult members.

Cult activities such as killing, maiming, raping of fellow students and even lecturers may disrupt the academic calendar of the nation's institutions of learning. The peace on campus is adversely affected whenever there is cult invasion. This may result in suspension of academic activities for some time.

This singular act can affect the years of graduation of students and may discourage some students from studying in the university affected. Also, a lot of lives and property have been destroyed through cult violence.

The effects of rioting in Nigerian system of education such as vandalisation and disruption of property of both public and private sectors at times can lead to injury or death. The effects of drug abuse are madness, anti-social behaviour, violence, crime and untimely death. Smoking and alcohol can also cause cancer and heart disease, diminishing self-esteem and sense of smell and taste.

Examination malpractice has a negative impact on the goals of education and renders it invalid and leads to irreversible loss of credibility. A country that becomes noted for examination malpractice loses international credibility. The implication is that documents emanating from such country will be treated with suspicion. It also leads to expulsion and rustication of students.

### **Religion as a Vehicle for Curbing Social Vices for the Enhancement of Positive School Climate**

Negligence of moral and religious instructions in schools have led to low moral standard in the society which many believe is responsible for the wide-spread cheating during examinations, cultism, rioting and drug abuse with their attendant consequences. As a result of low moral standard in the society, decay has set in and hard work is no longer regarded as important. Those who work hard are looked upon as fools in the society. Religion is a force that can be used to curb these social vices because religion plays the role of inward conviction which will exert the strongest influence upon all citizens of the country.

Religion inculcates moral discipline into individuals which will help in eradicating social vices in the society. It provides inspirations required by Nigerians to unite and fight against these vices. Moreover, religion is a reliable and potent element for the eradication of social vices as well as a veritable weapon for promoting good school climate. Students and teachers must adhere to religious tenets to enable them produce total transformation of lives for the enhancement of positive school climate.

Undoubtedly, religion permeates every aspect of human life. It lays emphasis on moral consciousness which is the life wire of any society. As Nigerian education system



today is characterised by cultism, rioting, drug abuse and examination malpractice, religion has to be given a priority because a morally conscious individual thinks better, acts better, and is amendable to the details of consciousness which will enhance positive school climate. (Eze, 2002)

### **Conclusion**

For a positive school climate, religious education which inculcates positive attitudes, values and morals should be re-introduced in schools to bring sanity in the educational system. Religion is an indispensable and critical element for the sharpening of character of students which will promote peaceful co-existence and enhance positive school climate. The moral decadence in the school system caused by the negligence of religious instruction will be eradicated through the entrenchment of religious studies in the school system. Religion remains the foundation upon which positive school climate could be achieved because it will discourage students from participating in social vices.

### **Recommendations**

The actualization of positive school climate will continue to be a mirage if cultism, rioting, drug abuse and examination malpractice are not eradicated from the school system. Therefore, government should lay more emphasis on religious studies at all levels of education for the inculcation of right morals into the students

- There should be moral upbringing of children by their parents to checkmate their unruly behaviour and exhibit character that conform to the societal norms and values. Government should enforce anti-cultism, anti-riot, anti-drug abuse and anti-examination malpractice laws which will discourage students from involving themselves in these vices and bring sanity to the school system.

There should be re-orientation in our tertiary institutions and government should provide adequate funding which will enable the school system to be conducive for effective teaching and learning.

Certificate should be awarded to the students based on their performance and character exhibited during the course of study. Any student with character flaw should not be awarded the degree and must be punished accordingly.

Government should condemn laziness and fraudulent act and emphasize more on hard work, integrity and peaceful co-existence.

Finally, students should be made to appreciate and value knowledge; because 'knowledge as they say is power'. Therefore, students should obey and respect the constituted authority for them to achieve the knowledge required for the enhancement of positive school climate.

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