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Perception of Students on Impact of Social Studies Curriculum in Addressing Secretive Fraternities among Colleges of Educations in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The prevalence of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly in Adamawa State, poses significant challenges to academic integrity, institutional management, and societal stability. This study examines the Perception of Students on Impact of Social Studies Curriculum in Addressing Secretive Fraternities among Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Grounded in differential association and opportunist theories, the research explores students' perceptions of the curriculum's effectiveness in fostering awareness and shaping attitudes toward cultism. A survey design was adopted, involving 196 participants from two colleges of education, with data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings reveal that the curriculum moderately addresses cultism by promoting awareness and ethical reasoning. However, gaps persist in resource adequacy and the integration of real-world issues. The study concludes that curriculum reform, coupled with innovative pedagogical strategies and institutional support, is essential for maximizing the curriculum's impact. Recommendations include integrating experiential learning, enhancing resource provision, and implementing institution-wide awareness campaigns to foster a culture of reform. This study contributes to knowledge by demonstrating the curriculum's potential in addressing societal challenges and advancing education as a tool for societal transformation.

Keyword: Social Studies, fraternities, Colleges

Introduction

The challenges posed by cultism and student unrest in tertiary institutions across Nigeria remain critical concerns for policymakers, educators, and societal stakeholders. These issues not only disrupt the academic environment but also undermine the moral and ethical foundation of Nigeria's educational system, with long-term implications for societal stability and national development (Owolabi & Alabi, 2021). Cultism, often associated with secretive fraternities, continues to infiltrate institutions of learning, introducing a culture of violence, fear, and moral decay (Massingill, 2023). Historically, secret societies have evolved from philosophical and fraternal traditions. For instance, the Freemasonry order, rooted in Enlightenment ideals and ancient guild practices, initially aimed to educate and morally uplift its members (Garlinghouse & McKelvie, 2022). However, these traditions, when transposed into the Nigerian context, have devolved into dangerous subcultures within tertiary institutions, marked by rituals, violence, and criminal activities (Elujekwute, 2019). Cultism in Nigeria's tertiary institutions has become a pressing issue, often labeled as the 'mother of crimes' within academic spaces. This menace has significantly affected institutional management, academic integrity, and the global perception of Nigerian graduates (Ogbagu, 2013). As Nnam (2014) aptly notes, the resurgence of cult-related activities represents one of the most significant challenges facing Nigeria's higher education system. These clandestine groups not only engage in violent acts but also disrupt academic calendars, incite fear among students and staff, and contribute to the declining quality of education.

The origins of cultism in Nigeria are often traced back to the Seadog Confraternity (also known as the Pyrates), established in 1952 by Wole Soyinka and six other students at the University College, Ibadan. Initially founded on principles of justice and non-violence, the group's trajectory changed dramatically in the 1960s, evolving into a violent and secretive cult. Over time, military interference in Nigeria's education system exacerbated the problem, with successive regimes exploiting student groups to suppress dissent and consolidate power. As Onyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015) argue, the intersection of political violence and cultism in Nigeria reflects deeper societal fractures rooted in corruption, economic inequality, and the erosion of cultural values. Empirical evidence provides further insights into the causes, effects, and possible solutions to cultism in Nigerian

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tertiary institutions. Ekpenyong (2010) identified economic collapse and poverty as key drivers of cultism, recommending improved educational funding to restore university prestige and deter cult-related activities. Ernest and Okeke (2025) highlighted determinants such as peer pressure, drug abuse, and poverty, noting that awareness campaigns and policy interventions are crucial. Omemu (2025) found public awareness campaigns effective in addressing cultism but emphasized the need for balanced disciplinary approaches. Eleje et al. (2024) underscored inadequate funding as a primary cause, advocating for targeted research and increased institutional resources to mitigate cultism's impacts. Together, these studies reinforce the urgency of multifaceted strategies to address cultism in Nigerian colleges of education. The Social Studies curriculum, as a multidisciplinary framework, offers a strategic avenue for addressing the challenges posed by cultism and secretive fraternities. Rooted in fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility, the curriculum aims to empower students to resist the allure of cultism and contribute positively to their communities (Ajiboye et al., 2022). By emphasizing social values, conflict resolution skills, and moral education, Social Studies equips learners with the intellectual and emotional tools to navigate complex societal challenges. Moreover, the curriculum aligns with global best practices in using education as a transformative tool for social change. For instance, UNESCO (2021) underscores the role of education in promoting peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity. In this context, Social Studies serves as a vehicle for instilling these values, particularly in regions where systemic issues such as cultism threaten educational and societal progress. Despite its potential, the effectiveness of the Social Studies curriculum in curbing cultism remains underexplored. While existing literature highlights its role in fostering civic consciousness and ethical behavior, empirical studies on its direct impact on cultism and student unrest are sparse. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive research that captures the perspectives of students, the primary beneficiaries of the curriculum and evaluates its efficacy in addressing the unique challenges of secretive fraternities in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The resurgence of cultism in Nigerian colleges of education, particularly in Adamawa State, necessitates a critical re-evaluation of the Social Studies curriculum. As societal dynamics evolve, the curriculum must adapt to address emerging challenges. For instance, integrating themes such as digital citizenship, peer influence, and the psychological underpinnings of group behavior could enhance its relevance and impact (Adeyemi & Dada, 2021). Furthermore, leveraging innovative pedagogical approaches, including experiential learning and community engagement, could foster deeper student engagement and understanding. Collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders are essential in ensuring the curriculum's alignment with contemporary realities and its capacity to effect meaningful change.

Objectives of the study

The general objectives of the study was on Perception of students on impact of social studies curriculum in addressing Secretive Fraternities among Colleges of Education in Adamawa state, Nigeria.. The specific objective of the study is to:

1. Assess students' perceptions on Social Studies curriculum contents as a mechanism for addressing Secretive Fraternities in Colleges of Education Adamawa State, Nigeria

Research Question

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of students' perceptions on Social Studies curriculum contents as a mechanism for addressing Secretive Fraternities in Colleges of Education Adamawa State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses was tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance:

- H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the perception of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as a mechanism for addressing Secretive Fraternities in Colleges of Education Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Theoretical frame work

This study is anchored on differential association theory, developed by Edwin H. Sutherland, and opportunist theory, proposed within broader criminological and sociological frameworks, including Robert K. Merton's strain theory, which provides foundational insights into opportunistic behavior. These theories offer comprehensive perspectives on the factors enabling secretive fraternities and inform how the Social Studies curriculum can address the problem. Differential Association Theory: Differential association theory, introduced by Edwin H. Sutherland (1947), asserts that deviant behavior, such as cultism, is learned through social interactions and exposure to deviant norms. The theory identifies factors such as frequent association with cultist peers, peer pressure, revenge, and youthful exuberance as main influences. Additionally, poor parenting and lack of supervision increase the likelihood of deviant behavior among students.



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Sutherland's theory suggests that students exposed to deviant social groups adopt behaviors and attitudes conducive to cultism. To counteract this, the Social Studies curriculum can incorporate lessons that teach students to recognize and resist peer pressure, develop moral reasoning, and build healthy interpersonal relationships. The opportunist theory is often associated with ideas articulated by scholars like Robert K. Merton (1938), who discussed how societal structures create unequal access to legitimate means of success, leading to deviant behavior as a coping mechanism. The theory posits that individuals, when faced with limited opportunities or challenging circumstances, exploit available means whether legal or illegal to achieve their goals. In the context of secretive fraternities, this theory explains how students may be drawn to cultism for material benefits, social acceptance, or academic advantages in a competitive and inequitable environment. By addressing systemic issues such as lack of student support, inadequate counseling, and limited recreational facilities, the Social Studies curriculum can redirect students toward constructive and ethical pathways for achieving success. Differential association theory focuses on the micro-level interpersonal dynamics that lead to cultism, while opportunist theory addresses the macro-level societal and institutional factors. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and combating secretive fraternities. A well-designed Social Studies curriculum can leverage these insights by promoting pro-social values, ethical decision-making, and community engagement.

Conceptual framework

Secret fraternities, or cults, are covert groups with significant societal and academic impacts. Ogunade (2005) defines a secret cult as "an exclusive holy philosophy and a closed-off community of people committed to the same purpose," emphasizing their ritualistic and symbolic practices, often involving blood. Adegbenro (2023) highlights cultism's violent consequences in academic institutions, where inter-group conflicts frequently result in fatalities. Ajayi et al. (2010) note the secrecy and ceremonial nature of these groups, underscoring their detrimental effects on members and institutions. Drivers of cultism include unemployment and social inequality (Oyetunde & Okafor, 2022), while Okeke and Hassan (2021) argue that social media facilitates recruitment and ideological dissemination. These critiques frame cultism as both a cause and symptom of broader societal dysfunction, such as declining moral standards and academic instability (Adegbenro, 2023). Conceptually, secret fraternities reflect sociocultural dynamics tied to inequality and moral decline, requiring interdisciplinary solutions that address their historical, psychological, and sociological dimensions

Literature Review

Cultism has become a pervasive issue in Nigerian higher education, evolving from benign fraternal organizations to violent, secretive groups. Early confraternities, such as the Pyrates, founded in 1952 at the University College, Ibadan, aimed to promote social justice and moral integrity among students (Massingill, 2023). However, these groups devolved into violent entities during the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, exacerbated by military regimes exploiting student groups to suppress dissent (Onyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015). This shift mirrored broader societal challenges, including political corruption, economic inequality, and moral decay (Elujekwute, 2019). Research highlights the detrimental effects of cultism on educational institutions, including academic disruption, violence, and a declining quality of education. Ogbagu (2013) identified cultism as a significant factor eroding the image and management of Nigerian tertiary institutions, while Nnam (2014) emphasized its role in fostering a culture of fear and impeding effective learning.

Factors Contributing to Cultism in Nigerian Institutions

Several factors contribute to the proliferation of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions, including societal pressures, economic hardship, and inadequate moral education. Onyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015) argue that political violence and systemic corruption have normalized deviant behaviors among Nigerian youth. Additionally, Elujekwute (2019) highlights the role of peer influence, a lack of parental guidance, and institutional weaknesses in perpetuating cultism. The transition of fraternal groups into violent entities has been linked to structural issues within Nigerian society. For instance, economic disparities and the erosion of cultural values create an environment where cultism thrives (Garlinghouse & McKelvie, 2022). Addressing these root causes requires a holistic approach, integrating education, community engagement, and policy reforms.

Social Studies Curriculum as a Tool for Social Transformation

The Social Studies curriculum is uniquely positioned to combat societal vices like cultism by fostering ethical reasoning, civic responsibility, and critical thinking. As a multidisciplinary field, Social Studies addresses societal challenges through themes of citizenship education, moral values, and conflict resolution (Ajiboye et al., 2022). The curriculum emphasizes the development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies, equipping students to make informed decisions and resist negative peer influences (Adeyemi & Dada, 2021). Globally, education has been recognized as a powerful tool for social transformation. UNESCO (2021) advocates for curricula that promote peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Within the Nigerian context, Social Studies serves as a critical intervention, particularly in addressing youth-related issues like cultism



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and violence (Owolabi & Alabi, 2021). However, the efficacy of this curriculum in Nigerian colleges of education remains underexplored, necessitating further research. Innovative pedagogical approaches can enhance the effectiveness of the Social Studies curriculum in addressing cultism. Adeyemi and Dada (2021) propose the integration of experiential learning, digital citizenship education, and community engagement to deepen student understanding and application of social values. By leveraging technology and interactive teaching methods, educators can foster critical thinking and ethical reasoning among students. Studies also suggest that community-based learning initiatives, such as service-learning projects and peer mentoring programs, can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Ajiboye et al., 2022). These approaches align with global best practices in education, emphasizing active learning and collaborative problem-solving. While existing literature underscores the potential of Social Studies to address cultism, there is a paucity of empirical studies examining its direct impact. Most studies focus on the general benefits of civic and moral education without exploring the curriculum's specific role in combating cultism in Nigerian Colleges of Education. Furthermore, research often neglects the perspectives of students, who are the primary beneficiaries and agents of change.

Methodology

This study utilized a survey research design to generalize findings from a sample of 457 NCE II students at the Federal College of Education, Yola, and the Adamawa State College of Education, Hong (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). A sample size of 196 participants, determined using the Research Advisor table (Research Advisor, 2006), ensured representation and validity. Data were collected through a self-developed questionnaire validated by experts in Social Studies, English Language, and Test and Measurement from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. A pilot test with 30 students yielded a high reliability score of 0.876 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2021). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, addressed research questions, while one-sample t-tests at 0.05 significance level tested hypotheses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2021). Ethical approval was secured, with informed consent obtained and confidentiality maintained throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

Presentation of Results

Bio-data of respondents

Table 1: Bio-data of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	103	53
Female	93	47
Total	196	100

Table 1 shows that male respondents are one hundred and three (103) representing fifty three (53) percent while female respondents are ninety three (93) representing forty seven (47) percent. In this distribution, female respondents are less comparing to their male counterpart.

Research Question one

What is the extent of the perception of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as tool for addressing secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

To answer this research question, the data collected was subjected to descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. Table 2 presents summary of the result:

Table 2: Summary of Means and Standard Deviations on views of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as tool for addressing secret fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1	Social Studies curriculum adequately addresses issues related to secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria.	3.13	0.864
2	I have a clear understanding of the content of social studies curriculum in addressing secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.96	0.858
3	Social Studies curriculum effectively incorporates real-world issues, including challenges posed by secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.04	1.137



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4	Social Studies curriculum has increased my awareness of the implications of secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.17	1.116
5	I am satisfied with the content of Social Studies curriculum in addressing issues related to secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	3.03	0.991
6	I believe that Social Studies curriculum is an effective tool for addressing the challenges posed by secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.62	1.024
7	Messages in the curriculum against secretive fraternities are clear and easily understandable by students in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.67	0.950
8	There are adequate resources (books, materials, etc.) in place to support the teaching of social studies curriculum content related to secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.63	1.144
9	Social Studies curriculum is effective in addressing issues related to secretive fraternities in colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	2.31	1.090
10	Social Studies curriculum has positively influenced my attitudes towards secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State.	3.02	1.022
Aggregate Mean		2.66	

Table 2 shows that the positive responses statements were accepted while the negative statement were rejected. The highest mean response was 3.13 while the lowest was 2.04. The aggregate mean was 2.66 above the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that the respondents accepted the statements which indicate agreement. This means that the respondents perceived that Social Studies curriculum contents are capable of addressing secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria

Hypothesis one:

There is no significant difference in the perception of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as tool for addressing secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of One Sample t-test on difference in the perception of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as tool for addressing secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria

Item	N	Mean	SD	SE	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
awareness of the implications of secretive fraternities	196	2.170	1.116	0.07897	27.478	195	0.000

Table 3 reveals t-calculated value of 27.478 and p-value of .000 at .05 level of significance. Since the p-value is lower than the t-calculated value, it means that there is significant difference in the perception of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as tool for addressing secret fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Therefore, it is evident that the awareness of the implications of secretive fraternities have positive influence. On this premise, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the perception of students on Social Studies curriculum contents as tool for addressing secretive fraternities in Colleges of Education in Adamawa State, Nigeria is rejected.

Summary of findings

Based on data analysis, the study came out with a major finding as presented below;

The study found out that students are of the perception that Social Studies curriculum content had moderately addresses secretive fraternities in Adamawa State Colleges of Education by fostering awareness and shaping attitudes, gaps remain in resource adequacy and integration of real-world issues. (P-value = .000).

Discussion of Finding

The findings from this study reveal that while the Social Studies curriculum moderately addresses secretive fraternities in Adamawa State Colleges of Education by fostering awareness and shaping attitudes, gaps persist in resource adequacy and real-world issue integration. This aligns with Ekpenyong (2010) and Eleje et al. (2024), who underscore structural and funding deficiencies as critical factors perpetuating cultism in educational institutions. Similarly, Ernest and Okeke (2025) highlight the role of institutional weaknesses, such as inadequate awareness and prevention mechanisms, which contribute to the

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persistence of cultism. However, a divergence emerges in the nature of recommended interventions. This study emphasizes the role of curriculum reform, while other studies like Omemu (2025) focus more on public awareness campaigns and disciplinary measures. The use of a survey design in this study, with validated and pilot-tested instruments, ensures reliability and internal consistency, evidenced by a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.876. This methodological rigor is comparable to Ernest and Okeke (2025), who also employed a mixed-methods design with robust validation processes. However, the inclusion of inferential statistics like one-sample t-tests in this study enhances its analytical depth compared to Ekpenyong (2010), which relied solely on descriptive statistics. A notable similarity across the studies is the ethical consideration, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent, as seen in Omemu (2025) and Eleje et al. (2024). However, the sampling techniques vary. For instance, this study used a probability-based method (Research Advisor table), ensuring representation, whereas Eleje et al. (2024) employed purposive sampling, potentially introducing bias. The findings of this study highlight the curriculum's potential as a tool for combating cultism, albeit with identified gaps. This aligns with Ekpenyong (2010), who recommends structural reforms, and Eleje et al. (2024), who advocate for increased funding. However, unlike Ernest and Okeke (2025), which identifies drug abuse and peer pressure as determinants, this study focuses on curricular inadequacies. One critical distinction is the emphasis on institutional roles. Omemu (2025) demonstrates the efficacy of public awareness campaigns, which this study supports indirectly by suggesting real-world issue integration. However, the current study expands on this by proposing a direct curricular response, offering a more comprehensive approach to fostering awareness.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Social Studies curriculum in Adamawa State Colleges of Education moderately addresses issues related to secretive fraternities, as evidenced by students' positive perceptions and significant differences in awareness and attitudes. While the curriculum fosters awareness and shapes attitudes effectively, it requires further enhancement to better incorporate real-world issues and ensure adequate teaching resources. This underscores the need for ongoing curriculum development and resource provision to maximize its impact on addressing societal challenges within the educational framework.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. To enhance the effectiveness of the Social Studies curriculum in addressing secretive fraternities, it is essential to integrate real-world issues through case studies, role-playing, and scenario-based learning while ensuring the availability of adequate teaching materials and instructor training. Institution-wide awareness campaigns should be launched in collaboration with stakeholders to promote the curriculum's objectives and foster a culture of awareness and reform. Additionally, periodic evaluations should be conducted to assess the curriculum's impact and guide data-driven improvements

Contribution to Knowledge

The study established that:

1. Students perceived that Social Studies curriculum content had the potential to address secretive fraternities by integrating real-world issues, offering a model for similar educational interventions, and advancing knowledge on education's role in combating negative social phenomena for broader societal reform.

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