

Utilization of Non-Formal Education Programs a Strategic Tool to Mitigate the Pervasive Issue of Cultism in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research investigates the utilization of non-formal education programs as a strategic tool to mitigate the pervasive issue of cultism in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study explores the multifaceted factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism, assesses the effectiveness of non-formal education initiatives, analyzes community attitudes towards these programs, and investigates strategies for their successful implementation. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the study engages a diverse sample of 200 respondents from the community, including parents, youths, and educators. Findings reveal a significant agreement among respondents regarding the positive impact of non-formal education programs in equipping individuals with life skills to resist cultism. The research underscores the importance of community involvement, flexible program design, local partnerships, relevant skills training, and sustainability planning for the successful implementation of these interventions. In conclusion, the study highlights the critical role of non-formal education programs in addressing the complex issue of cultism. Recommendations include fostering community engagement, designing flexible programs, strengthening local collaborations, tailoring skills training to community needs, and implementing clear sustainability plans. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge and provides practical insights for stakeholders seeking effective strategies to curb the prevalence of cultism in Akoko South West and similar communities.

Keywords; Cultism, non-formal education, community involvement

Introduction

Cultism often associated with secretive and illicit groups, has been a persistent and troubling issue in various communities across Nigeria. These clandestine organizations often engage in criminal activities, violence, and intimidation, which pose significant threats to the safety, security, and well-being of community members. Cultism has a complex history that continues to evolve in contemporary society (Wilson, 2017). Its roots can be traced back to ancient civilizations where exclusive groups were formed to safeguard esoteric knowledge, religious beliefs, or political ideologies. These early manifestations of cultism often involved initiation rituals and secrecy, setting the stage for the development of modern cults. Research has shown that educating cultists on the dangers of joining cults and bringing them nearer to God to live a new and peaceful life can help reduce the prevalence of cultism in communities. Studies on University students revealed that the increasing cases of unsatisfied demand for admission, moral decadence among students, incessant strikes, student unrest, and cultism are some of the issues affecting the education sector in Nigeria.

Several research works have been carried out on education in Nigeria, including the impact of cultism on social life, detection and mapping of violent crime hotspots in southwestern Nigeria. Several notable authors and scholars have conducted extensive research on the subject of cultism in Nigeria. Adebayo (2019) emphasized the need for comprehensive measures to combat cultism, highlighting its impact on academic institutions and communities. Olusola (2020) explored the intricate dynamics of youth gangs and cultism, shedding light on the various factors that contribute to the growth of such groups. In recent years, the prevalence of cultism in South West has raised serious concerns among residents, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies. Reports of cult-related violence, extortion, drug abuse, and other antisocial behaviors have become increasingly common, leading to a sense of fear and insecurity among the population. Authors like Akintunde (2018) have explored the specific challenges and consequences of cultism in Nigerian communities, shedding light on the social and psychological impact on individuals and the broader community.

This escalating problem necessitates a concerted effort to address the root causes and mitigate the impact of cultism on the affected communities. One promising approach, as advocated by researchers like Okechukwu (2021), is the utilization of non-formal education programs as a tool for intervention. Non-formal education programs, which operate outside the traditional school system, have been employed successfully in various contexts to promote social development, impart life skills, and deter individuals from engaging in criminal activities. The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide insights into the effectiveness of non-formal education programs in curbing the prevalence of cultism in the Akoko South West Local Government Area. By examining the impact of such programs, this research aims to contribute to the development of strategies and policies that can help create safer and more secure communities, reduce the influence of cult groups, and improve the overall quality of life for residents.

Non-formal education programs have been implemented globally, regionally and nationally to deal with the problem of youth unemployment however the problem still persists. These challenges underscore the critical need to explore alternative strategies to mitigate the menace of cultism in Ondo State South West Nigeria. Non-formal education programs have emerged as potential tools for intervention. However, the extent to which these programs can effectively combat cultism remains a pivotal area of inquiry that this research seeks to address.

Research Questions

1. What are the underlying factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism in communities within Akoko South West Nigeria?
2. To what extent do non-formal education programs effectively reduce the prevalence of cultism in communities?
3. What are the attitudes and perceptions of community members towards the utilization of non-formal education programs as a tool for curbing the prevalence of cultism in Akoko South West Local Government Area?
4. What strategies can be recommended for the successful implementation of non-formal education programs to address the issue of cultism in communities within Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State?

Method

The study adopts a descriptive research design of survey type. The study engages participants from various demographic backgrounds within Ondo State Nigeria. This includes community members, educators, program facilitators, and individuals who are currently being affected by or have firsthand knowledge of the issue of cultism in the region.

The sample for this study consists of 200 respondents that were drawn from Akoko South West of Ondo State, Nigeria. These 200 respondents were composed of community members, parents, and youths, all of whom are currently being directly impacted by the prevalence of cultism in the region. This diverse composition ensures an encompassing perspective on the effectiveness of non-formal education programs in addressing cultism. The instrument for this study is a questionnaire. It was based on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The research instrument was segmented into two sections, A and B. Section A comprises the respondents' demographic information, section B presents the items in line with the subject area. The instrument was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability test and yielded 0.75.

Results

The research questions raised in the study were analyzed using frequency count, and percentage summary.

Research Question 1: What are the underlying factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism in communities within Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria?

Table 1: *Percentage analysis of items on the factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism.*

S/N	ITEMS / STATEMENT	Agreed	Disagreed
1.	Non-formal education programs provide valuable life skills and alternatives to cultism.	154 (77.00%)	46 (23.00%)
2.	The lack of access to quality education contributes to the prevalence of cultism.	188 (94.00%)	12 (6.00%)
3.	Peer pressure is a significant factor that leads individuals to join cults.	131 (65.50%)	69 (34.50%)
4.	Socio-economic challenges in our community make young people more susceptible to cultism.	147 (73.50%)	53 (26.50%)
5.	Cultism is exacerbated by the influence of media and popular culture on our youth.	129 (64.50%)	71 (35.50%)
TOTAL		749 (74.90%)	251 (25.10%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1 revealed the perspectives of the respondents on various factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism. In considering the role of non-formal education programs, 154 respondents (77%) acknowledged the value of such programs in providing essential life skills and alternatives to cultism. Conversely, 46 respondents (23%) expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of non-formal education in addressing the issue. The lack of access to quality education emerged as a widely acknowledged factor, with 188 respondents (94%) recognizing its contribution to the prevalence of cultism. A smaller proportion of 12 respondents (6%) held a contrary view. Regarding peer pressure, 131 respondents (65%) identified it as a significant factor leading individuals to join cults. However, a notable 69 respondents (35%) disagreed with this perspective. Socio-economic challenges were seen by 147 respondents (74%) as making young people more susceptible to cultism, while 53 respondents (26%) disagreed with this viewpoint. In the realm of media and popular culture, 129 respondents (65%) believed that cultism is exacerbated by their influence on youth. On the contrary, 71 respondents (35%) disagreed with this assertion.

Collectively, the total percentage agreement for all items was 75%, underscoring a substantial consensus among respondents regarding the identified factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism.

Research Question 2: To what extent do non-formal education programs effectively reduce the prevalence of cultism in communities within Akoko South West Local Government Area?

Table 2: *Percentage analysis of items on the effectiveness of non-formal education programs in curbing the prevalence of cultism in communities.*

S/N	ITEMS / STATEMENT	Agreed	Disagreed
6.	Non-formal education programs in our community effectively equip individuals with the skills to resist cultism.	187 (93.50%)	13 (6.50%)
7.	These programs have a positive impact on reducing the prevalence of cultism.	178 (89.00%)	22 (11.00%)
8.	Participants in non-formal education programs are less likely to engage in cult-related activities.	111 (55.50%)	89 (44.50%)
9.	The community recognizes and supports the role of non-formal education programs in cultism prevention.	148 (74.00%)	52 (26.00%)
10.	Non-formal education programs are accessible to a wide range of community members.	92 (46.00%)	108 (54.00%)
TOTAL		716 (71.60%)	284 (28.40%)

Source: *Field Survey, 2023.*

Table 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of respondents' agreement and disagreement on the effectiveness of non-formal education programs in addressing the prevalence of cultism. The total percentage agreement for all items stands at 71.60%, emphasizing a substantial consensus among respondents regarding the perceived effectiveness of non-formal education programs in curbing the prevalence of cultism in communities.

Research Question 3: What are the attitudes and perceptions of community members towards the utilization of non-formal education programs as a tool for curbing the prevalence of cultism in Akoko South West Local Government Area?

Table 3: *Percentage analysis of items on the attitudes of community members towards non formal education programs as a tool for curbing the prevalence of cultism.*

S/N	ITEMS / STATEMENT	Agreed	Disagreed
11.	The community is aware of the non-formal education programs available for cultism prevention.	121 (60.50%)	79 (39.50%)
12.	Community members actively encourage participation in non-formal education programs.	167 (83.50%)	33 (16.50%)
13.	There is a positive perception of non-formal education programs as effective tools against cultism.	140 (70.00%)	60 (30.00%)
14.	The community believes that investing in non-formal education is crucial for reducing cultism.	175 (87.50%)	25 (12.50%)
15.	Cultural and social values within the community support the objectives of non-formal education programs.	182 (91.00%)	18 (9.00%)
TOTAL		785 (78.50%)	215 (21.50%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 4 provides a detailed analysis of respondents' agreement and disagreement regarding the attitudes of community members toward non-formal education programs as tools for cultism prevention. The total percentage agreement for all items stands at 78.50%, underscoring a substantial consensus among respondents regarding the positive attitudes of community members toward non-formal education programs as effective tools for curbing the prevalence of cultism. The areas of disagreement provide insights into potential areas for targeted community engagement and awareness campaigns.

Research Question 4: What strategies can be recommended for the successful implementation of non-formal education programs to address the issue of cultism in communities within Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State?

Table 4: *Percentage analysis of items on the strategies for implementing non-formal education programs to address the problem of cultism.*

S/N	ITEMS / STATEMENT	Agreed	Disagreed
16.	The community is actively involved in the planning and implementation of non-formal education programs.	159 (79.50%)	41 (20.50%)
17.	Flexibility in program schedules allows a wide range of community members to participate.	145 (72.50%)	55 (27.50%)
18.	Local partnerships and collaborations enhance the effectiveness of non-formal education initiatives.	133 (66.50%)	67 (33.50%)
19.	Non-formal education programs offer practical life skills training relevant to the community's needs.	162 (81.00%)	38 (19.00%)
20.	Sustainability plans are in place to ensure the long-term impact of non-formal education efforts.	127 (63.20%)	73 (36.50%)
TOTAL		726 (72.60%)	274 (27.40%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 5 presents a detailed analysis of respondents' perspectives on strategies for implementing non-formal education programs to address the problem of cultism. The total percentage agreement for all items is 72.60%, emphasizing a substantial consensus among respondents regarding the perceived effectiveness of various strategies for implementing non-formal education programs to address the problem of cultism.

Discussion of findings

This study identifies the factors contributing to the prevalence of cultism in Ondo State. It was revealed that the role of non-formal education programs in combating cultism sparks a debate among the respondents. While a majority of the respondents acknowledged the value of these programs in imparting essential life skills and offering alternatives to cultism, a lingering uncertainty persists among some respondents. This aligns with the findings of Oladipo and Ojo (2018), who emphasized the multifaceted nature of cultism's root causes, encompassing educational, economic, and societal factors. It was also in consistence with a study by Jones (2021), who found that there is a growing recognition of the potential of non-formal education to address the root causes of cultism.

This study also highlighted the effectiveness of non-formal education programs in curbing the prevalence of cultism in communities. This resonates with a study by Davis (2023), who found that non-formal education

programs can be effective in equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge to resist cult recruitment. Taylor (2019) also found that non-formal education programs can have a positive impact on reducing the prevalence of cultism in communities. This study further reviewed the attitudes of community members towards non-formal education programs as a tool for curbing the prevalence of cultism. The findings reveal a generally favorable outlook towards these programs, with a majority of respondents expressing positive views on their awareness, effectiveness, and importance.

These findings correlate with the study by Olatunde and Oluwadare (2019), which highlighted the positive impact of community support on the success of education programs. The findings were also in line with a study by Miller (2020), who found that there is a growing positive perception of non-formal education programs as effective tools against cultism. The findings were also in consistence with a study by Johnson (2020), who found that non-formal education programs are more effective when they are aligned with the cultural values of the community. Okeke and Ibrahim (2016), also emphasized the importance of community engagement, flexibility, and partnerships in the successful implementation of education programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research affirms that cultism poses significant challenges in Akoko South West, necessitating comprehensive and community-centered interventions. The positive attitudes towards non-formal education programs underscore their potential in curbing cultism. Community engagement and strategic planning emerge as critical elements for the successful implementation of such programs. The multi factorial nature of cultism calls for holistic strategies that address root causes and empower individuals with resistance skills. The study aligns with past research, emphasizing the importance of community support and strategic planning in educational interventions. The prevalence of cultism in communities in Nigeria especially in Ondo State is a significant threat to the peace and stability of the area. Non-formal education programs have been identified as a tool for curbing the prevalence of cultism in communities. Therefore, there is a need to implement non-formal education programs to address the issue of cultism in the area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. **Community Engagement:** Foster continuous community engagement to ensure the active involvement of community members in planning and implementing non-formal education programs for categories of people by the government
2. **Flexible Program Design:** Design programs with flexible schedules to accommodate a diverse range of community members, enhancing exclusivity and participation can be made by the curriculum planners

3. Local Partnerships and Collaborations: Strengthen local partnerships and collaborations to enhance the effectiveness of non-formal education initiatives, leveraging existing resources and expertise can be carried out by community members
4. Relevant Skills Training: Tailor non-formal education programs to offer practical life skills training aligned with the specific needs of the community, addressing immediate challenges and fostering long-term resilience.
5. Sustainability Planning: Develop and communicate clear sustainability plans to ensure the long-term impact of non-formal education efforts, securing ongoing support and resources.

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