

**ADDRESSING THE HIGH SPATE OF NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND  
MISCONDUCTS IN NIGERIA HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH  
ETHICAL RE-ENGINEERING**

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**Abstract**

*The global South to which Nigeria is a micro-cosm has one thing in come which is the ravaging plague of poverty driven by negative attitudes and misconducts. This phenomenon has continued to cripple the ability of its people to transform themselves and their environment in order to create a continuous improvement in human and physical conditions of life. Generally vices negate progress in life, institution or society but it becomes worrisome when its spate keeps rising to an alarming proportion as is common in contemporary Nigerian higher institutions. The implication of this ugly trend becomes very pertinent when one considers that the youth of any nation constitute the driving force of both the political and economic leadership of the future. This is because no nation can develop or join the committee of developed nations when the majority of her youthful generations are overrun by erroneous, erratic, vanitous and corruption driven life-style. This work therefore calls for ethical re-engineering as a tool for bridging the gap of social vices eroding the foundation of quality educational system in Nigeria higher institutions.*

**Introduction**

Negative attitudes and misconducts in this context relates to ethical challenges that subsist in our universities which no doubt is a microcosm of the wider Nigeria society. They constitute those sinful or evil habits that endanger our collective and individual existence. The study of attitudes and conducts has been a subject of great concern among scholars in the social sciences as well as other interested stake holders in the Nigerian project for a long time now.

The import of the above submission is made vivid by a speech which was made by the former president of Nigeria ShehuShagari at the University of Nigeria convocation of 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1982, where he stated that attitudinally Nigeria is sliding into a great pit as a people. Thus he notes that globally Nigeria can be rated as a highly poor attitude nation. He is obviously not the only Nigerian who is concerned about the growing attitudinal decay in Nigeria. .

There is hardly any government that comes to power in Africa without identifying the elimination of corruption and anti-social vices as the major thrust of his policy trust of ethical revolution. This no doubt underscores that we are really living in decadent times. Yet the challenge that poverty of character continues to pose over the years especially as it has to do with social vices among our young generation leaves much to be desired. This is because in spite of several efforts of succeeding government the nation don't seem to record commensurate return in terms of attitudinal change which is usually reflected in terms of better life among the citizenry. This no doubt continues to create a vicious cycle as the quest to put in place an irreversible foundation for the entrenchment of sustainable social and economic development remains a mirage.

Social vices especially among our youths have continued to engender all forms of negative impact to our educational and national development. Consequently the issue for ethical re-engineering in the nation becomes highly desirable because it is connected to political, social, economic and educational development of the African people. Ahmad (2014) in his work posits that the high spate of negative attitudes and conducts in our institutions of higher learning has become alarming. Furthermore, he notes that this trend, cuts across different levels of students of Universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. This was equally the view of Sampsum (2009) when he cites Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, as upholding the view that today's youth are been torn apart by all kinds of illicit lifestyle with drug abuse ranking highest.

Furthermore he notes that even though an increasing number of youngsters are engaging in all kinds of criminal behaviour many don't seem to know that their crimes are wrong, nor do they care. No doubt this underscores the ethical gap that is widening in our education, system and delivery as well in the homes. Okonkwo (2014) in her contribution puts the above view pointedly when she opines that today's youth are unduly exposed to environment that do not promote their ethical development. According to him families, schools, media and even the church are being negatively influenced by all forms of behaviour that endanger the society as well as our youth mentally, physically, academically, morally, physically academically, morally, economic and otherwise. The implication of this ugly trend becomes very pertinent when one considers that the youths of any nation constitute the driving force of both the political and economic leadership of the future. This is because no nation can develop or join the committee of developed nations when the majority of her youthful generations are overrun by erroneous, erratic, vainous and corruption driven life-style. This paper is therefore an attempt to propose a functional platform that could be employed as a re-engineering strategy for combating the above attitudes and conducts among the Nigerian university students which are endangering quality educational output from our institutions of higher learning. It is a call for ethical re-engineering as a tool for bridging the gap of social vices eroding the foundation of quality educational system in Nigeria higher institutions.

### **Conceptual Definitions**

**(i) Attitude:** The concept of “attitude” represents one of those social science concepts which lack a common definition. According to Allen and Schwarz (2004) attitude is defined as the posture or position expressing some thought or feeling. It also defined the concept as a habitual mode of thought. However according to Oslan and Zonna (1983) as cited by Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2007: 446) psychologists formally defines an attitude as a learned tendency to evaluate some object, person or issue in a particular way. Moreover, while citing Eagly&Chaiken (1985) they posit that an attitude has three components namely the cognitive, affective and behavioural (psychomotor). Cognitive component refers to the beliefs, thoughts and ideas about the attitude object. The emotional components they note embraces the feelings and emotions such as hate related to an attitude object. The behavioral or psychomotor refers to the predisposition to act in a particular way i.e the action component that drives an attitude e.g. a petition, a campaign. Thus they posit that attitudes can be positive or negative. Corroborating the above definition Okafor (2013:365) states that attitudes refers to “a hypothetical construct that represent an individual degree of likeness and/or dislikeness of an item”. Attitudes is thus defined by him as the general thinking or feeling of a person about somebody or something which may be interpreted as negative or positive. It is the mirror that reflects how one thinks, behaves or feels about a person, place or thing. Unlike personality which is fixed attitudes are dynamic and can change as ones experiences change. In other words it is the predisposition or ones state of readiness or mental bent that influences an individual to act or react in a particular way with respect to certain stimuli be it somebody or something.

**(ii)Conduct:** According to an online dictionary the term conduct relates to the way a person behaves in a particular place or situation. People’s conduct are driven by their faith or beliefs, genetic configuration, social norms or social values one adopts. From the foregoing individual conducts are driven by attitudinal disposition. Moreover, the Chambers Dictionary (2004:343) defines the term conduct as behavior. In his own contribution Okafor (2013) defined it as a person’s behavior in a particular place or in a particular situation. What this means is that a conduct like an attitude can be positive or negative. They are negative when they are seen as deviation from the societal norms and expectation. Negative conduct or anomic conduct therefore are behavioural traits that go against the good of the society.

**(iii)Higher Education/University system:**The word higher education or university according to Allen and Schwarz(2004:1830) is defined as relating to those institutions of higher learning with power to grant degrees, diplomas and certificates as well as its body of teachers, students, graduates etc, . The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1975: 1272) defines the term university as educational institution designed for instruction and examination of students in all or many of the more important branches of advanced learning, conferring degrees in various faculties, and often embodying colleges and similar institutions.

University according to Okafor (2013:367) refers to the environment dominated by people obsessed with the passion to seek the truth, know the truth and live the truth with a view to impacting significantly in moving the world forward. Moreover he notes that the word university comes from the latin word *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* roughly meaning “community of teachers and scholars”. Against this backdrop the word university as used in the above context refers to a broad spectrum of ideas covering the following concept – place of all round intellectual development or centre of investigation of universal knowledge and truth with a view to advancing the human society. Azikiwe (1937) puts this pointedly when he states that university are centres where the destiny of nations, peoples and individuals are shaped through the subjugation of all things material to the court of human learning and reason. University system therefore refers to those instruments that provide interphase for the various stakeholders of university education. It is a system that must integrate wholeness to various field of learning. What this means is that it must emphasize not only the learning that fosters scientific and technological development it should equally provide opportunity for quality development of the human person morally, socially, culturally and spiritually. University education should simply put emphasize the development in character and learning so as to ensure the preservation and perpetuation of the society. This is because ethical or moral backbone is needed to ensure the integration of the diverse structural networks that defines every society and where there is no cohesion society breakdown and disintegrate into oblivion.

### **Taxonomy Of Negative Attitudes And Misconducts In Nigerian Universities System**

In this section we shall attempt to classify the various negative attitudes and misconducts that have continued to bedevil the university system in Nigeria. This negative attitudes and misconducts can be traced back to the Nigerian – Biafra civil war of 1967 to 1970 an era that brought a lot of degeneration to thenation’s morality. The above development unfortunately led to an under- emphasis in the moral education of the youths in the higher institutions. According to Okafor (2013: 368) it was a period when there arose great indifference to religious education of the youths. Consequently the nation suffered heavily from the sad development by turning out from that time forward youths that are grossly lacking in morality and conduct. Moreover the problem of high explosion in students intake into the institutions of higher learning driven by increasing demand for higher education compounded the problem of quality and so turned the universities to a place where standards in learning were compromised because of inadequate facilities. All these factors promoted the breeding ground for all kinds of misconduct and negative attitudes in Nigerian universities such as :

- Cultism
- Examination malpractices
- And academic misconduct/impersonation
- Drug abuse/addiction
- Rape/sexual harassment/prostitution/co-habitation
- Beating/fighting/other forms of physical violence
- Robbery/burglary/stealing/ Extortion
- Use of dangerous weapons/assassination
- Demonstrations/riots/arsons

- Indecent dressing
- Cyber crime

We shall however belimiting our further discussion on the above topic to those vices that are highlighted below as they provide us a window into the vices that overrun the wider society.

**i. Indecent Dressing**

Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in contemporary times are overrun by all kinds of indecent dressing especially by the female students. Corroborating the above view Okwu (2006:19) states that obscure dressing by the female students has become what is now called the weapons of mass distraction (WMD) and sexual harassment. The menace of indecent dressing is now made evident as our girls of today are known for putting on very short skirts, scandalous dresses like sagging, trousers, show breast, and show belly. It now appears fashionable to dress half nude, dressed in sleeveless/see-through tops without bra a development which has made our universities centres for sexual distraction, violation and harassment to both our male students and lecturers. When God covered man's nakedness in the Garden of Eden it reveals nudity in whichever form as evil and against divine mandate for man. Society must therefore enforce dressing code both at institutional and national levels that reduce the dangers inherent in seductive dressing.

ii. **Sexual Promiscuity:** Another social vice posing serious threat to higher educational system in Nigeria is the growing incidence of sexual promiscuity. Illicit sexual living that is expressed in forms of pre-marital sex, sex-hawking, homo-sexuality, lesbianism and bestiality (sex with animals) as well as rape has continued to derail the minds of our youth from serious academic exercise to the pursuit of fun and easy life. This was the view of Okwu (2006:196) when he states that some youths become so wild on the illicit lovemaking that they give most of their time and attention to it to the detriment of their studies. Moreover he notes that some abandon their career pursuit to keep appointment with the sugar daddies or boy-friends. Furthermore he notes that some through illicit sexual living become victim of teenage pregnancy and in process of trying to terminate same may end up dying or developing major health complication that could permanently damage their reproductive organ. Equally it should be noted that even some female youth use their bottom power to secure quality grades or to buy male impersonator who sits for their exams. The result is that they end up merely acquiring degrees or certificate without the commensurate knowledge that is needed for the advancement of society.

iii. **Drug abuse:** Okwu (2006:195) defines drug abuse as referring to the use especially by self-administration, of any drug in a manner that deviates from an approved medical or social patterns within a given culture. Moreover he notes that government agencies refers to the use of any illicit substance such as opoids, heroine, marijuana (Indian hemp) as drug abuse. Sampson (2009) while citing Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General states that drug abuse is tearing apart our societies, spawning crime, spreading diseases such as AIDS, and also killing our youths and our future. Furthermore he notes that despite well known risk, people continue to abuse drugs and such abuse continues to destroy lives. Although drugs have many important benefits to man yet when

they are abused they endanger a lot of negative consequences such as wastage of money/resources, lack of concentration in studies, violent crimes such as suicide, rape, armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, prostitution and psychosomatic disorders/diseases. According to Bell (1970) many causes accounts for why youths engage in drug abuse such as cultural, social, economical, psychological, and family pathology. What this means is that in addressing the scourge of drug abuse in our society there should be a synergistic approach between the family, schools, media, government and non-governmental agencies.

**iv. Examination malpractice**

Examination malpractice according to Ministry of Education Benue State, 2001 relates to any act of omission or commission which compromises the validity and integrity of any examination. There are many causes of examination malpractices in our country but few of them can be listed as follows:

- a) Deplorable moral value in Nigeria
- b) Parental pressures/bribery of teachers/examiners as well as hiring of impersonators for their children
- c) Over-emphasis on paper qualification
- d) Inadequate teaching and learning facilities
- e) Diversion of students interest from academic work to such vices as drug abuse, illicit sex, cultism and pornography

To curb the increasing trend of examination malpractice, our leaders, parents and the society in general should reverse our undue emphasis on materialism as a measure of success. They should promote hard work, productivity, honesty and moral excellence as the hallmark of true success. Moreover adequate punishment should be put in place to ensure that those who engage in this social menace are adequately punished to serve as deterrent. Furthermore teaching staff should be well remunerated to serve as motivation for excellent performance.

**(v) Co-habitation**

According to Ahmad (2014) co-habitation which also he refers to as campus marriage has become a common occurrence among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The above concept, he notes relates to a situation whereby a male and female student live together in a rented apartment outside the school environment as husband and wife. The social implication of the above immoral act is many. For some majority of their interests is diverted from academics to enjoying all forms of frivolities which bothers on experimenting the bliss of marital life before leaving campus to eventually getting married proper. The result is that they remember that they are students only when examinations are approaching. With such disposition to life their studies generally suffers. Moreover it promotes fraudulent lifestyle among the youths as they cook up all forms of lies in order to dupe their parents financially to be able to maintain their status of husband to their so called students wife (partner). Besides while a good number indulge in all kinds of birth control techniques to prevent pregnancy the unfortunate ones among them get pregnant which lead to their dropping out of school while some girls in bid to terminate their pregnancy end up in premature death because of unsuccessful abortion.

**(vi) Cultism:** The concept according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary cultism is defined as a small group of people who have extreme beliefs and who are not part of any established religion. The Oxford Concise Dictionary Of Sociology (1996) gives the sociological definition of cult as a small group or religious sect whose belief are fundamentally secretive, esoteric and individualistic. In his own view Ogundele (2002) defined cult in the perspective of secret cult. According to him secret cult is defined as an enclosed organized association or group that is committed to a common cause. In other words the term refers to an enclosed body of people driven by an exclusive hidden ideology and series of rites that revolves around their sacred symbols. Moreover he notes that the term also refers to fraternities whose members usually operate through oath of secrecy, an allegiance, which serves as a strong bond among them.

Magnet (1971:217) was in agreement to the above view when he states that secret societies refers to close associations, guilds and cult groups who operate in the context of closed or secretive membership. Corroborating the above view the Lexicon Websters Dictionary defines secret cult as a group of people who are bound by a common cause and whose mode of meetings, initiations into rank and file as well as their agenda are usually done in secret. Ogunbameru (2004) puts this pointedly when he submits that the term secret cult relates to any form of organisation whose operations are carried at odd hours of the day and whose goals often clash with the accepted norms and values of society.

Umeh (2001:6) captures the above idea vividly when he states that cultism is an act that can be identified as a brutal, gun-trotting, trigger happy, axe-machete or sword wielding, blood thirsty individuals who springs surprise attacks on enemies or perceived enemies, maiming or killing them, and disappearing within seconds of his atrocity, leaving the society shocked and traumatized. Continuing she notes those involved in cultism can strike at any time of the day. And though they tend to exhibit a variegated personality they are in most cases operate through an attitude which may be stemmed from several divergent factors embracing emotional, mental or academic challenges. Besides power seeking, protection, including love, or outright demonstration of wickedness could also be motivating factors for engaging in cultism. This cultism could be seen as a religious belief driven by wickedness, greed, insecurity and normlessness.

According to Moreau, (2000:20) cultism in the context of Christian philosophy or ideology is defined as any group, movement, or teaching that deviates from the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by Orthodox biblical Christianity. According to him cultic religion presents two core features by which they can easily be identified namely.

➤ A false or inadequate basis of salvation: According to him all cultic deviations tend to downplay the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. St Paul made a timeless submission when he notes that man's salvation is by grace through faith, it is not of works lest any man should boast. (Eph 2: 8-9).

➤ A false basis of authority. Cultic deviations can easily be identified in the statement regarding the basis of their authority. For while biblical Christianity determines truth whether in matter of faith or in practice through the authority of the scriptures, cultic groups resorts to extra-biblical traditions or authorities.

### **Theories and /or Sources of negative attitudes and misconduct in the Society**

i) **Theological Sources:** The Bible has a definite historical theory of the origin of the sin of humanity or their negative attitudes and misconducts which it traces to Adam, as recorded in Genesis 3. Commenting on the above theory Gerhard (1974:281) states that it is a belief that is grounded on the fact that humanity became sinful as a result of Adam's sin of disobeying God by eating the forbidden fruit as recorded in the Genesis 3. As to how Adam's sin was transmitted to his descendants, Wiley and Culbertson (1946:178) as cited in Opeloye (2014:221) states that it relates to the theory of genetic mode. According to them the above theory is an expression of the natural law of heredity which states that in the law of organic life, everything reproduces after its own kind, not only at the anatomic dimension and physical characteristics but also at the level of mental disposition. They thus opine that the law of genetic transmission determines the likeness of offspring to the parents. Pauline theology corroborates the above theory when in his writing in Romans 5:12 he states that sin came to the world through one man and death through sin, such that death spread to all men because all have sinned. Buttrick (1962:364) in his contribution on the theological origin of sin relates it to the demonic factor. According to him the Scripture describes Satan as the originator of sin as well as the father of murder and deception. (1 John 3:8, John 8:44) Sin from the foregoing has to do with the divine revelation which posits that man is borne evil a nature which it claims is an inherited capacity.

ii) **Psychological Theory;** Another theory of the origin of sin as described by Mckenzie and cited in Opeloye (2014) is the psychological origin of sin. This theory which states that sin originated from the corrupt heart of man finds supportive references from both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) scriptures. In the OT Genesis 8:21 claims that sin is a disposition driven by the stubbornness of man's evil heart. This truth is corroborated in Ezekiel 11:9 when it states that except man is given a new heart, he would continue to commit sin. The NT agrees with the above theology when in the light of Jesus declaration it states that "sin has deep root in the corrupt heart of man" (Mark 7:21-23). Human misconducts and negative attitudes from the foregoing are driven by internally deformed human heart. What this means is that human conduct are driven by internal volition or bent which may be negative or positive.

iii) **Sociological factors:** According to the structural conflict theorists like Karl Marx, Joseph Lenin and Fredrick Engels different kinds of conflicts in the society are predicated on the increasing level of structural imbalance in the society. Structural imbalance is manifested in many forms such as oppression, injustice, inequality, discrimination, poverty and exploitation. The above theory therefore holds the view that many vices that people engage in the society are driven by the environmental forces of man's inhumanity to man. According to them it is the society that mars or makes people's ethical conduct.

### **Conclusions**

This work has been able to identify the various negative attitudes and misconducts that have continued to pose threats to the development of university education system in Nigeria. Such attitudes and misconducts were listed as embracing cultism, drug abuse, prostitution, exam malpractice, sexual harassment, use of dangerous weapons, assassinations, armed robbery amongst others. It was noted that the increasing trend of



gross decay in the cultural ethos and misconduct of our university students in recent times are predicated on the rising profile of moral decay in our nation. Besides the inability of our universities to cope with the population explosion of student intake and their competitive demand of quality education amidst the reduced funding by the government is also another factor triggering disaffection and violence in the universities. Furthermore the work posits that man has an inherent evil nature which compels him to decadent lifestyle. The result is that our universities in modern times have become centres for all kinds of criminality and insecurity of lives and properties. It is against this backdrop that the following suggestions have been made as a way forward.

### **Recommendations**

1. The university system should promote dialogue among the various stake holders to reduce the constant resort to violence by students. In other words, the university system should run in such a way that there are enough windows provided to allow students access and share information with respect to the running of the universities.
2. There should be high level of visibility of the law enforcement agencies in the campuses to serve as a serious deterrent to die hard cultist and to secure prompt intervention activity against sudden attacks.
3. The government should provide adequate legislation that will make cultism as well as other forms of criminality an offence punishable on conviction by the court of law.
4. The church and para-church groups should play frontline role in converting morally misguided youths to God fearing members of the society through Christian evangelism, and prayers.
5. Parents should start early to provide the moral foundation that would positively shape the direction and character of their children in their latter years.
6. There should be adequate support services to give rehabilitation to those students who are ready to give up cultism and other forms of destructive lifestyle and lead normal lives. Such services should be run by the university counseling unit and religious organization.
7. Government should provide scholarships to indigent students as well as increase funding of the higher education with a view to reducing the current high tuition fees charged which in many cases serve as breeding ground for all kinds of students' unrest in the university.
8. The society, parents, governments, and institutions of higher learning should strive to promote regular campaign that emphasizes the destructiveness of cultism and negative conducts in our society both to the students and society with a view to calling for renunciation and repentance from the penitent ones.
9. Moreover there is the need to ensure that male and female boarding facilities are made compulsory for our institutions of higher learning especially for the first and second year students who fall prey easily to syndicates charged with recruiting new members into cultism, sex hawking trade and other forms of illicit behaviour.

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