

Moral Education Strategies for Reduction of Cohabitation among Undergraduates in Public Universities in South East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined how moral education strategies can reduce cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. The sample size of 310 vocational education students was drawn from the population of 619 years three and four students from the four federal universities in the region using a purposive sampling technique. Data were obtained through the researchers' structured questionnaire, which was face validated by three experts. The Cronbach Alpha statistical tool obtained an overall reliability coefficient value of 0.82. Data were analysed using mean. Findings revealed that providing counselling services and accommodation facilities were found to contribute to reducing cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities. It was recommended that the government and all other education stakeholders intensify efforts to ensure that counselling units across the various tertiary institutions in Nigeria are equipped with the necessary tools needed to be functional, among others.

Keywords: *Moral Education, Strategies, Cohabitation, Undergraduates, Universities*

Introduction

Observations have shown that most Nigerian public tertiary institutions are overpopulated due to inadequacy of facilities. It is this inadequacy, such as shortage of hostel accommodation among others, that has given rise to a geometric increase of off-campus accommodation (Uche, 2010; Arisikwu, 2013; Soboye, 2013; Nucci and Ilten-Gee, 2018 and Svodziwa and Kurete, 2017). One of the advantages of campus hostel accommodation is that the university can positively influence students' daily activities in terms of access to utilities, security, hygiene, and interpersonal relationships (Nucci and Ilten-Gee, 2018). The school authority also oversees the students' morality and encourages them to be bookish by providing hostel reading rooms.

Unlike the campus hostel accommodation supervised by school authorities, the off-campus accommodation lacks this security and supervision. Most students who cohabit indulge in the act without the consent of their parents and, as such, are exposed to all forms of risk (Arisikwu, 2013). Despite these demerits, and in recent times, off-campus accommodation has been so common that many family houses are now turned into student lodges, with many houses found bearing names given to them by students. Interestingly,

studies have shown that inadequate hostel space constitutes one of the disadvantages of campus hotel accommodation, as students of the opposite sex are found cohabitating under the façade of lack of accommodation. Cohabitation is not a recent phenomenon permeating most public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is an intimate sexual union between two unmarried partners who share the same living quarter for a sustained period (Bachrach et al., 2000). The practice is so familiar that it has become a way of campus life. Unfortunately, students involved in cohabitation see nothing wrong with it based on the different views of students and other interviewed individuals. Preliminary investigations show that many unmarried students are indulged in this act. Many younger students cohabit and enter joint living arrangements due to unstable partnerships (Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, 2016). The empirical study further revealed that the desire for intimacy and sex regularly were some of the reasons for cohabitation among students in tertiary institutions (Fareo and Moses, 2018). Sad enough, this uncultured act has been nicknamed by students to make it soft and acceptable within the university community with names such as campus marriage, campus coupling or partners. This leads to the proliferation of immoral practices among students, among which is the high rate of abortion in tertiary institutions (Adeniyi, 2019). This has led to their poor academic performance in universities.

Commenting on the poor academic performance of students who indulged in cohabitation (Ojewole and Akinduyo, 2017) reported that students who abstain from sex are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college (university) than their sexually active peers. In this report, the authors establish a direct relationship between the learning environment and students' academic performance. The learning environment encapsulates the totality of all facilities and resources within the school system to stimulate teaching and learning. One such facility is the introduction of moral education strategies into the learning environment. Empirical evidence on the relevance of moral education strategies has also proven germane in curtailing moral decadence among teeming students in tertiary institutions.

Moral education is a valuable and effective strategy for reducing cohabitation among students. This education is concerned with enabling students to critically consider and review their commitments in a discursive process, with the help of the scientific concepts of ethics, as a part of the reflective construction of their identity narratives (Wardekker, 2004). This implies that moral education involves deliberations among students to think about their actions analytically and reflect on them afterwards (Mark, 2015). This deliberation guides their intentions, attitudes and behaviours towards others and their environment. It enables individuals to make valuable decisions that conform to societal norms (Pujara, 2018). It aims to develop positive attitudes and values that provide an adequate basis for students to learn effectively. Invariably, being honest, just, legitimate, and sensitive may not have been unconnected with the basic principles of moral education. It is also unlikely to say that moral education is more of a practice that enriches people's way of life. Hence, Pujara (2018) explains that moral education dictates excellent and bad by providing a list of good and socially acceptable norms. In addition, violence and disruptive behaviours of students were reported to be eliminated through moral education strategies (Krek, 2020). These strategies constitute services or facilities provided to aid in promoting academic excellence in tertiary

institutions while reducing, if not completely eradicating, unethical practices among students. In the present study, discourse is made on some strategies: counselling services and provision of facilities. The choice of these strategies is based on the fact that the spread of moral decadence in public tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria has recently remained unabated.

Counselling is not a process of giving advice but helping a genuinely needy patient (Kumar, 2020). From this view, one could say that counselling goes beyond advice but is directed at helping an individual to help himself and overcome his problems. The counselling process begins with the counsellor establishing a relationship with the counsellee, taking the counsellee into confidence and allowing him or her to open his or her heart. Furthermore, after understanding the situation, the counsellor advises the counsellee to face the harsh realities of life and society while building confidence and paving the way to use his or her strengths by overcoming weaknesses (Onu, 2020). The study has shown that the consequences of not adhering to counselling by students were manifested in unwanted pregnancy, lack of concentration, and contact with diseases such as HIV, Syphilis and other communicable diseases (Adewale, 2019). It is not surprising that counsellors were once advised to liaise with medical personnels in health centres of the universities to organise lectures on the health hazards of cohabitation (such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and damage to the female uterus) and its effect on students' academics (Onoyase, 2017). Besides, reports have proved the efficacy of this strategy on students in terms of building self-confidence and determination to face life situations. On the contrary, Astute, Purnama., Kurniasari, and Lestari (2021) reveal that more students had problems in their personal lives and ignored counselling services.

In addition to counselling services, providing not just facilities but adequate accommodation, such as hostel accommodation in tertiary institutions, is believed to aid in reducing cohabitation among students in Nigeria. These facilities are found to broadly impact the performance of the dwellers in all facets of life (Kolawole et al., 2010). Agreeably, student cohabitation is mainly associated with or caused by inadequate accommodation (Svodziwa and Kurete, 2017). Hence, the university facility is primarily academic, social, or non-commercial (New York University, 2018). However, the present study identifies hostel accommodation as one of the university facilities that promotes cohabitation when inadequate. Quality and cheap hostel accommodation is believed to discourage students from searching for an off-campus place, thus increasing their academic performance. The study of (Duyilemi et al. (2018) indicates that 71.8% of students affirmed that cohabitation has contributed to a high level of moral decadence in society and low academic performance.

Despite the contributions of moral education strategies in promoting decent living among students for academic excellence, the paucity of literature providing empirical evidence has given rise to the present study. The quest for empirical evidence may have been connected with previous studies showing that theoretical moral education was insufficient and that emphasis should be placed on knowledge transfer into practice (Goldstein and Iso-Ahola, 2006). More so, the provision of literature is believed to provide insight into the extent to which these strategies are adequately provided and made available in public tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria for qualitative education. The study, therefore, attempts to

determine the extent to which moral education strategies can contribute to reducing cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the extent to which the provision of counselling services can reduce cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East Nigeria.
2. ascertain the extent to which the provision of accommodation facilities can contribute to reducing cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East Nigeria.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design aims to collect data on and describe systematically the characteristics, features, or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). This design is also based on similar studies where it was adopted (Olori and Olori, 2016; Ogu et al., 2022). The area of study was public universities in South East Nigeria. The study population comprised 619 students made up of 335 year three and 284 final students of the Vocational Education Department from the four Federal Universities. Information sources were from the examination and records of the various university departments in the 2021/2022 academic session. The sample size for the study was 310 (50 per cent of the entire population) drawn using a purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was the researchers' structured questionnaire titled, 'Moral Education Strategies for Reduction of Cohabitation Among Undergraduates' (MESRCU). The questionnaire had two sections, A and B. Section A was designed to collect relevant information about the respondents, while Section B dealt with items raised for the research questions. This section had two clusters. Cluster A elicited information on the extent to which counselling services have aided in reducing cohabitation among undergraduates. At the same time, Cluster B dealt with the extent to which the provision of accommodation facilities has contributed to the reduction of cohabitation. The response mode adopted for the study was a 4-point rating scale of VHE (Very High Extent), HE (High Extent), LE (Low Extent) and VLE (Very Low Extent).

The relevance of the instrument and its appropriateness for the study was established by subjecting the questionnaire to face validity by three experts: one from the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, one from Business Education and one from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Science Education, all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was established on a trial testing carried out by administering copies of the questionnaire to 25 students of Enugu State University. The choice of this institution is based on the fact that it shared the same experience with the University of Nigeria Nsukka regarding having a population with no commensurate facility. The reliability coefficient values of 0.88 and 0.76 were obtained for the clusters, and the overall value of 0.82 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha Statistical tool. Data generated from the field were analysed using the mean. The criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making. Mean scores of 2.50 and above were classified as high extent, while below 2.50 were regarded as low extent.

Theory

The study adopted Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Kohlberg believes morality is perceived as having interpersonal behaviour that includes either party's rights, duties or welfare. Suffice it to say that cohabitation results in two independent persons who are sexually involved rather than being committed to one another for the rest of their lives. This interaction between the two further explains cohabitation as a social problem. Kohlberg argues that the prerequisite of an action to be regarded as moral is based on its consistency with what an individual freely adjudged to be morally correct. This invariably may have contributed to assigning several names to the act. The theory advocates the sequential growth of an individual without skipping any stage. Thus, moral development encourages the students' gradual sociological and psychological stages of development. He further proposed three moral stages, namely pre-traditional, traditional and post-traditional.

While the last stage is attained after age 16, relevant to the present study, the students are believed to have rooted moral ideas in some inherent moral absolutes. Although, these absolutes may not conform with those of others or society. Moral development is therefore required to enhance the moral values of students. At the same time, the tertiary institution becomes a full-day pedagogical institution where the roles of parents are taken over to a great extent. In other words, the institution is not only a place of learning but exhibits a duty characterised by giving a family-like life. Moral education, therefore, aims to help students improve their moral values and social skills through modelling, counselling, instruction, experience, and continuous practice. Studies have also shown that tertiary institutions can improve students' character, making the theory suitable for study.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does the provision of counselling services contribute to the reduction of cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Responses of the Respondents on the Extent to which Counselling Services can contribute in the Reduction of Cohabitation Among Undergraduates of Public Universities (n=306)

S/N	Item	Mean	Remark
1	Providing me with quality counselling relating to my choice of career	3.20	High extent
2	Explaining to me the real meaning of campus life	3.20	High extent
3	Guiding me on the choice of life style to live on campus	3.10	High extent
4	Exposing me to the real dangers of cohabitation	3.40	High extent
5	Providing me with knowledge on consequences of cohabitation in the campus.	2.80	High extent
	Grand Mean	3.10	High extent

Table 1 shows that respondents indicated that through counselling services, students were provided quality counselling relating to choice of career with a mean score of high extent (3.20); explaining the real meaning of campus life had a mean score of 3.20 as high

extent; guiding in the choice of life style to on campus had a mean score of 3.10; exposing the real dangers of cohabitation had a mean score of high extent (3.40), and providing with knowledge on consequences of cohabitation of campus had a mean score of high extent (2.80), Therefore, the grand mean of 3.10 shows that the extent to which counselling services can contribute in the reduction of cohabitation among undergraduates of public universities in South East, Nigeria was high.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the provision of accommodation facilities contribute to the reduction of cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Extent to which the Provision of Accommodation Facilities can contribute in the Reduction of Cohabitation among Undergraduates of Public Universities (n=306)

S/N	Item	Mean	Remark
1	Building of more students' hostels to provide enough space for me to live with students of same sex.	2.70	High extent
2	Regularly supplying of electricity and water to make me comfortable in hostels	3.00	High extent
3	Providing of neat hostels to discourage me from living off-campus	3.40	High extent
4	Providing of ICT facilities to give me opportunity to explore campus resources	3.30	High extent
5	Providing of gender specific facilities to give me opportunity to interact mostly with people of same sex in their hostels	2.90	High extent
	Mean	3.06	High extent

Table 2 shows that respondents indicated that building more student hostels to provide enough space for same-sex to live had a mean score of high extent (2.7); regularly supplying electricity and water for comfort in the hostels had a mean score of high extent (3.00); providing neat hostels to discourage living off-campus had a mean score of high extent (3.4); providing of ICT facilities to allow for exploring of campus resources had a mean score of high extent (3.30); providing of gender-specific facilities for opportunities to interact primarily with people of same-sex in their hostels had a mean score of high extent (2.9). The grand mean of 3.06 further shows that the extent to which the provision of accommodation facilities can contribute to the reduction of cohabitation among undergraduates of public universities in South East Nigeria was high.

Discussion

Findings revealed that the extent to which counselling services can contribute to reducing cohabitation among undergraduates was high in South East public universities. The high level may be attributable to the various roles in exposing students to the veracity of life and possible ways of achieving moral and academic excellence. It also presupposes that counselling is one of the services taken to cushion the spread of cohabitation among undergraduates through its educative functions. Some of these roles were evident in offering quality counselling concerning career issues and exposing students to the real meaning of campus life. It is believed that while the students become conscious of their lifestyle through counselling, their eyes are open as they understand the dangers of cohabitation. Thus, the danger of cohabitation among students was found in society's high level of moral decadence (Duyilemi et al., 2018).

Furthermore, on health and emotional stability, unwanted pregnancy, lack of concentration, and contamination of diseases such as HIV, Syphilis and communicable diseases were found (Adewale, 2019). To address this menace, it was suggested that counsellors should liaise with medical personnels in health centres of the universities to organise lectures on the health hazards of cohabitation (such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and damage to the female uterus) and its effect on students' academics (Onoyase, 2017). To this end, the present study attempts to convey this knowledge through empirical evidence to support assertions on the dangers associated with cohabitation.

Findings reveal that the extent to which the provision of accommodation facilities can contribute to reducing cohabitation among undergraduates in South East public universities was high. This may not be surprising because providing facilities such as suitable hostel accommodation and recreation centres within the school community were necessary to encourage the students to live within the campus to avoid cohabitation. This is also true as a shortage of campus accommodation has caused students to rent off-campus residential buildings (Arisikwu, 2013). Further studies indicated that student cohabitation is mainly associated with or caused by inadequate accommodation (Svodziwa and Kurete, 2017). Hence, it was suggested that the Nigerian government at all levels should wake up to their responsibility to provide accommodation in universities to cushion the issue of inadequacy (Svodziwa and Kurete, 2017). This suggestion is timely following the high enrollment rate of undergraduates in public universities with limited facilities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that moral education strategies occupy a pivotal place in the acquisition of moral values and competencies required for academic excellence by undergraduates. This is possible by inculcating the correct values capable of repelling cohabitation in the learning environment. The study gives credence to the findings on moral education's efficacy in eliminating students' violence and disruptive behaviours (Krek, 2020). Underlying the fact that empirical evidence is relatively limited to disseminate the applicability of moral education strategies such as counselling services and provision of accommodation facilities to reducing cohabitation, the present study, while providing this

literature, believes that these strategies can significantly contribute to the reduction of cohabitation among undergraduates in public universities in South East, Nigeria.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government and all other education stakeholders should intensify efforts to ensure that counselling units across Nigeria's various universities are equipped with the necessary tools to be functional.
2. The government should ensure adequate student accommodation facilities, especially gender-sensitive facilities, to reduce cohabitation.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study has provided empirical evidence on the dangers associated with cohabitation in public tertiary institutions. Beyond instilling correct values in students, which moral education could achieve, its strategies span through facilities, principles and other measures incorporated into the university system that will foster unquestionable characters while promoting academic excellence among the students.

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