

Religious Affiliation and Human Rights Violation In Student Personnel Administration In Secondary Schools In Cross River State-Nigeria

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Abstract

The study evaluates religious affiliation and human rights violation in student personnel administration in Secondary Schools in Cross River State, Nigeria against the background of observed human rights violations in the administration of Secondary Schools in Cross River State. Using one null hypothesis with religious affiliation as the independent variable and human rights violation as dependent variable.

The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The independent variable was operationalized into three dimensions of Catholics, Pentecostal and others. The ex-post facto design was used in the study. From a population of 2130 Senior Secondary Three students in the Cross River State public Secondary School system, 1000 of them randomly selected from 50 schools were sampled for the study. A 38-item Students Legal Rights Protection Questionnaire (SLRPQ) was constructed by the researchers. It was face-validated and the reliability coefficient ranged between 0.79-0.90. The questionnaire was thereafter administered to Senior Secondary Three students. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used in analyzing the data coupled with a post-hoc analysis in the form of Fisher's Least Significance Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis of the differentiated levels of students' human rights violation on the basis of religious affiliation. The result showed that Catholics tended to experience significant violation of their rights to fair hearing freedom of thought/association, and freedom from discrimination than Pentecostals and others.

Key words: Students' religious believes and affiliation, students' personnel management, human rights and freedom.

1.0. Introduction

Students are unarguably the most essential elements in the school system as far as teaching, research and manpower training are concerned. The attainment of educational goals in a school presupposes the existence of the atmosphere of peace and order which is only possible through respect for the rule of law, including students' right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It is however, to be noted that Nigerian students, just like the staff of a typical secondary school have constitutionally-guaranteed fundamental human rights. The school principal, as the key student personnel administrator, may promote or breach these rights if he or she is unmindful of the constitutional provisions. One of such rights is students' right to religious affiliation.

A conducive school climate incorporates the protection and promotion of the human rights of the persons operating within the school organization expressed, in part as a well-rounded students' personnel administration which incorporates various administrative activities and services geared towards the development of students. Fundamental human rights as provided in chapter, 4 of 1999 constitution and enshrined between S. 33 and S. 43 includes the rights to life, dignity of human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private and family life up to and including the "Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Section 38). This also includes the right to hold, manifest and practice one's religion or belief, in worship and observance, without the educational institution compelling students to engage in any act of worship other than that approved by their parents. Where students' personnel administration in public secondary school acts in breach of this constitutional provision, it could tantamount to violation of students' religious rights. Cognizant of these facts, the researchers were interested to study religious affiliation and students' human rights in relation to the school authorities' practice of students' personnel administration.

1.1. Statement of the problem

The problem of this study is situated in the observation that issues and problems arising from the educational sector are, nowadays, entertained in courts of law. This contrasts with the past where violation of students' rights by school authority was regarded as school-bound, domestic or localized matters. In contemporary times, with the growing complexity of educational management, and the politicization of the education enterprise, Nigerian citizens have become more than ever before aware of their constitutional, legal and fundamental human rights. The school administrator, as it were, is now being caught up and confronted with the legal implications of his job, including his/her approach to student's personnel management.

The truth of the matter from the researchers' observation is that abuse of the rights of students', inclusive of religious rights continue to be perpetrated by school principals in public secondary schools in Cross River State of Nigeria, sometimes out of ignorance. It prompts the question, "Are students' personnel administrators (or principals) violating students' rights in terms of the students' religious affiliation?"

1.2. Research hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the degree of violation of students' human rights as perceived by the students themselves on the basis of religious affiliation.

2.0. Methodology

The research design was ex-post facto. The research area is Cross River State – one of the 36 States in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all the 2130 Senior Secondary Three (SS III) students in all the 232 public Secondary schools in Cross River State (Cross River State Secondary Education Board, 2009). The sample for the research however, consisted of 1000 Senior Secondary Three students in 50 public secondary schools. Multi—stage sampling (involving stratified simple random technique) was adopted.

A 38-item student's legal rights protection Questionnaire (SLRPQ) formed the researchers-developed instrument for data collection. It had two parts: Part I sought to obtain respondents' demographic data while Part II requested for information as they affected students' rights in students' personnel administration. Part II measured on a five-point Likert type scale, responses to the statements on human rights violation in students' personal administration. The scoring of items ranged from "Always" (5 points), "Most Often" (4 points), through "Sometimes" (3 points) to "Hardly" (2 points), and "Never" (1 point), when the items were positively worded. the scoring was reversed.

The instrument was face-validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria, whose inputs ensured that it was valid for measurement. Again, the reliability of the instrument (SLRPQ) was established through a test-retest reliability estimate. In carrying out this trial test 50 respondents who were not part of the study's sample were randomly selected from public secondary schools in the state. The questionnaire was administered to this pilot subjects twice, but at two weeks interval. The data that were obtained were analyzed through Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis (r). The test-retest reliability coefficient of $r=0.79$ was obtained. This gave the confidence that the instrument was good enough for use in the research.

3.0. Results

The hypothesis, tested at 0.05 level of significance indicated no significant difference in the degree of violation of students' human rights based on religious affiliation. The independent variable in the hypothesis is religious affiliation with three dimensions – Catholic, Pentecostal and others; while the dependent variable is level of students' human rights violation along the six components of right to dignity of human person; right to fair hearing; freedom of thought/religion; freedom of expression/press; right to peaceful assembly/association; and freedom from discrimination. To test this hypothesis, each sub-variable of level of students' human rights violation was analyzed against the three categories of religious affiliation using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

The result of the analysis is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

The result in Table 2 shows that the calculated F-value for dignity of human person (2.88), freedom of expression/press (1.480) and peaceful assembly/association (1.330) are each less than the critical F-value of 3.00 at .05 level of significance with 2 and .997 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was not rejected for these sub-variables. However, the calculated F-value for freedom of fair hearing (68.054), freedom of thought/religion (14.564) and freedom from discrimination (9.241) are each higher than the critical F-value of 3.00 at .05 level of significance with 2 and .997 degrees of freedom. This implies that the violation of students' rights among those of Catholics, Pentecostal and others, differ significantly; students of Pentecostal Faith appear to have had their rights less violated than Catholics and those of other faiths.

To determine the degree of influence, a further analysis was employed using Fisher's least significant different (LSD) multiple comparison analysis. The result is presented in Table 3.

4.0. Discussion and implication

The results of the study revealed that there is significant difference in the degree of violation of students' human rights owing to religious affiliation. The result is in line with research findings credited to Peretomode (1992) who observed that most students in Ghana were forced by school authorities to receive religious instructions or take part in religious ceremonies other than their own or those approved by their parents or guardians.

The result portrays an infraction of students' rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion by school authorities or school principals in student personnel administration. Whether Catholic, Pentecostal or others, it is not uncommon for the religious affiliation of students to be undermined as secondary school principals in Cross River State have been observed to be in the habit of decreeing prayer and fasting for all in the school including staff and students either, weekly, biweekly or monthly. This is in spite of the religious persuasion of the students involved whether Catholic, Pentecostal and others. The principal seems to take no cognizance of the religious affiliations of the students who could be Catholics, Pentecostals, traditional worshippers and other faith. It is common to find rules and regulations in secondary schools in Cross River State of Nigeria that undermine the freedom and individuality of students such as compulsory salute to the national flag, recitation of verses of the Holy Bible before and after classes.

Nigeria is a secular state. It follows then that religious practices and worship when made compulsory would violate students' right to freedom of worship. As such, no religion or denomination should acquire a universal status in the school system.

From the study, the case of the catholic students having their rights more significantly violated than those of the Pentecostals and others was highlighted. It may in fact, be a pointer to the religious sensitivity of an average Catholic student in the Cross River State public secondary system who may not wish that their religious rights be overlooked by school authorities.

The implication of the study is that latent faith or belief-related conflict may be brewing in the public secondary school system of Cross River State, and perhaps other states in Nigeria, owing to the violation of students' fundamental human rights based on religious affiliation. The other implication is that principals should be sensitive and neutral to students' religious sentiments.

5.0. Conclusion

In the light of the research findings, it is obvious that ignorance of human rights regime by school administration is evident. School authorities are abysmally ignorant of human rights as provided for by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Religious intolerance has become an endemic scourge that easily finds expression amongst school administrators in the discharge of their personnel function, poor knowledge and awareness of one's rights and obligation to others grossly undermines one's ability and poise for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Stereotypes and negative cultural practices erode individual and collective sensitivity and sensibilities associated with civilized and democratic culture.

Finally, any polity that allows majority of its citizens uneducated may find itself afflicted with human rights abuses including religious intolerance.

5.1. Recommendations

Pursuant to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were therefore, advanced;

1. Conscious and concerted efforts should be made to integrate human rights culture in Secondary school curriculum
2. Curriculum reforms and innovation should designate a separate subject to be named and called human rights at the secondary school level. This would cater for human rights, democratic culture and religious freedom and tolerance.
3. Workshops and seminars on Human rights education should form part of the training and retraining programmes of secondary school teachers to enhance the realization of human rights culture and religious tolerance in the polity.
4. Government should distinguish patriotism and nationalism from the symbolic flag salute ritual.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the six components of Human Rights violation as experienced by students on the basis of Religious affiliation

Students' Rights	Religious affiliation	n	X	SD
Dignity of human person	Catholic	210	25.83	2.57
	Pentecostal	455	26.11	2.41
	Others	335	25.69	2.59
	Total	1000	25.91	2.51
Fair hearing	Catholic	200	17.79	2.86
	Pentecostal	455	20.52	2.79
	Others	335	20.18	3.02
	Total	1000	19.83	3.07
Freedom of thought/religion	Catholic	210	19.24	2.67
	Pentecostal	455	20.52	2.79
	Others	335	20.18	3.02
	Total	1000	20.14	2.88
Freedom of expression/press	Catholic	210	20.26	2.69
	Pentecostal	455	20.51	2.79
	Others	335	20.18	3.02
	Total	1000	20.35	2.85
Peaceful assembly/association	Catholic	210	20.40	2.86
	Pentecostal	455	20.51	2.79
	Others	335	20.18	3.02
	Total	1000	20.38	2.89
Freedom from discrimination	Catholic	210	17.00	1.46
	Pentecostal	455	18.54	1.86
	Others	335	18.16	2.09
	Total	1000	18.28	1.88

This provided a basis for the ANOVA on Table 2

Table 2: One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of differential level of students' Human rights violation on the basis of Religious affiliation (N = 1000)

Students' Right	Source of variation	Ss	Df	MS	F	Sig. of F
Dignity of human person	Between group	36.138	2	18.069	2.88	.057
	Within group	6255.762	997	6.275		
	Total	6291.900	999	---		
Fair hearing	Between group	132.863	2	566.431	68.054*	.000
	Within group	8298.237	997	8.323		
	Total	9431.100	999	---		
Freedom of thought/religion	Between group	235.800	2	117.900	14.564*	.000
	Within group	8070.975	997	8.095		
	Total	8306.775	999			
Freedom of expression/press	Between group	24.025	2	12.012	1.480	.228
	Within group	8093.475	997	8.118		
	Total	8117.500	999	---		
Peaceful assembly /association	Between group	22.125	2	11.062	1.330	.265
	Within group	8293.475	997	8.318		
	Total	8315.600	999	---		
Freedom from discrimination	Between group	64.458	2	32.229	9.24*	.000
	Within group	8293.475	997	3.448		
	Total	8315.600	999	---		

Significant at .05level, critical f = 3.00, df = 2.997

Table 3: Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis

Students' Rights	Religion (I)	Religion (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Fair hearing	Catholic	Pentecostal	-2.7608*	.24068	.000
		Others	-2.3934*	.25393	.000
	Pentecostal	Others	.3374	.20770	.150
Freedom of thought/religion	Catholic	Pentecostal	-1.2784*	.23736	.000
		Others	-.9410*	.25043	.000
	Pentecostal	Others	.3374	.20483	.000
Freedom from Discrimination	Catholic	Pentecostal	-6.337*	.15580	.000
		Others	-.2594	.16437	.115
	Pentecostal	Others	3.243	.13445	.005

Significant at .05 level of significance

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