

The Role of Interactive Religious Art in Fostering Moral Reformation among Student Cultists in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the utilization of interactive religious art to disseminate moral teachings and foster a sense of social responsibility among student cultists in Nigerian higher educational institutions. It expands the current literature by examining art as a medium for moral reformation. It addresses a geographical deficiency in Nigerian higher educational institutions, specifically those governed by the Nigerian government. Through extant literature, observations, and interviews, this research employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the efficacy of interactive religious art in fostering moral behavior among Nigerian student cultists. Using 50 students and other 200 sampled participants, the study indicates that interactive religious art can significantly contribute to moral reforming among student cultists by offering a distinctive and compelling platform for reflections, dialogue, and transformation. It is recommended that future research should investigate the impact that interactive religious artwork has on moral regeneration among a wide range of demographics, such as cultists, students in secondary school, employees of the civil service, and younger people.

Keywords: *Higher Education Institutions, Interactive Religious Art, Moral Reformation, Nigeria, Student Cultists.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant problems in Nigeria is the high percentage of cultism that is prevalent among students attending higher education institutions. Nigeria's higher educational institutions contend with the problem of secret cults, initially a reaction to racial prejudice, but today, a detrimental subculture associated with violence, substance abuse, and sexual immorality, necessitating different techniques for moral reform (Turner, 2007). This problem has led to acts of violence, deaths, loss of property, and waste of resources. Even though it is the most democratic institution in Nigeria, the higher education system is severely plagued by incompetence and failure to adapt to

changing circumstances (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). The government, institutions, and relevant individuals have implemented various strategies to combat the issue. However, the problem persists. Cultism adversely affects academic endeavors and the moral rehabilitation of cultists within educational institutions. As Aniako et al. (2012) stated, the issue has not been resolved despite the religious interventions.

The rising recognition of art's role in tackling societal issues and the heightened interest in religious art for spiritual practices necessitates exploring, creating, and implementing interactive religious art. This aims to facilitate the collaboration between art and religious professionals in addressing the issue of cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning (Longsdorf, 2018). Religious art is an effective medium for propagating, disseminating, and conveying religious beliefs, teachings, principles, morals, values, thoughts, worries, and concerns to those who view it. Ideas can be communicated engagingly and interactively through the design and execution of practical, interactive religious art (Aremu, 2014). The created interactive religious art also aims to serve as a medium for religious transformation, dialogue, and dissemination while facilitating the moral reformation of adherents of secret cults in an engaging and captivating manner. Nigerian tertiary educational institutions can study interactive religious art that involves audience engagement in its development or interpretation. This method can denounce and rehabilitate student cultists, potentially mitigating their excesses and fostering spiritual and moral enlightenment. In this article, the authors propose creating and advancing interactive religious artwork to enhance moral reformation and combat cultism among students in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions. The paper also highlights the necessity of developing novel solutions to address this issue.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Deterioration of morality is a worldwide problem, especially among younger generations. At the same time as it moderates community and identity, art is an expression of culture. Because it interprets the sacred, artistic expression in religion has been discovered to be helpful in evangelization. In order to promote moral reformation through interactive religious art, role-playing and teaching moral precepts against cultism-related vices are essential components. The teaching of religious art emphasizes the meticulous organization of art methods and performances to guide the interpretation of the audience and accomplish the desired meaning.

Theory of cognitive development

The theory proposed by Piaget of cognitive development, often known as genetic epistemology is an extensive framework for the essence and evolution of human intellect (Bjorklund, 2018; Block, 1982). The foundation of its importance in fostering cognitive development is how contemporary art keeps viewers interested and presents them with problems. This hypothesis investigates how exposure to interactive religious art can significantly impact cognition and moral engagement, particularly for individuals such as student cultists with a skewed or underdeveloped worldview.

Interactive religious art could be a viable way to encourage mental development and moral reflection among these students within the higher education setting in Nigeria. Those who participate in more interactive art interactions tend to grapple with and modify their ideas more profoundly as they become more aware of the significance of arguing worldviews and values.

The exposure of viewers to contemporary art that is both engaging and challenging can have a substantial impact on cognition and moral involvement (Wade, 2019). Art might contribute to intellectual growth and moral transformation among student cultists. Those who come from lower social classes are the ones who benefit the most from the good impact that contemporary art has on their cognitive abilities and their moral engagement. As a general rule, those who take part in art activities that are more involved are more likely to struggle with and significantly alter their worldviews. One of the reasons for this consequence is that people from lower social classes are more likely to be exposed to diverse cultural resources through contemporary art (Ottuh, Omosor, & Abamwa, 2023). Another reason is that these individuals have less confidence in their own opinions and are more eager to utilize the cultural resources that contemporary art provides. These points are critical to consider in investigating the function of interactive religious art in the cognitive development and the moral reformation of student cultists.

Theory of social learning

Social learning theory posits that new behaviors can be acquired through observing and imitating a cognitive process that may transpire in a social situation without the necessity of muscular reproduction or reinforcement (Gamble, 2018). According to the social learning hypothesis, humans can acquire new knowledge or conduct new behaviors by studying other people while considering the qualities of the observed model and the influences of the surrounding environment. This article explains the rationale behind the belief that interactive religious art is an efficient vehicle for the moral regeneration of cultists. According to Roso (2013), the theory comprises four key ideas: focus, retention, reproduction, and inspiration. In the first place, attention is a term that describes exposure to the model as a prerequisite for social learning. The properties of the framework, the spectator, and the way they view context all play a role in the amount of learning that occurs. Considering that the artworks are based on Christ's suffering and resurrection, it is probable that student cultists will pay attention to them as they struggle to come to terms with the failure of their respective cults (Ottuh, Omosor, & Abamwa, 2023). Second, the retention process involves transitioning a behavior or activity that the observer has observed into an internal cognitive structure. Two possible manifestations of the internal representation are a verbal code and visualization. Looking at the artworks will, ideally, result in the creation of pictorial or auditory depictions of the events that the student cultists described. These representations can then be accessed and retrieved at a later time. Thirdly, reproduction is the visible demonstration of behavior, action, or knowledge learned through overt performance. The observer must possess the necessary intellectual and physical capabilities before the observation. It is necessary for student cultists to possess the ability to change and reproduce in order for them to be able to produce anti-cult behavior or information. Art education should be used to encourage these capacities

actively. According to Espinor (2010), vicarious reinforcement, the result of their expectations, self-efficacy expectations, and incentives are the four components that substantially impact the observer's level of involvement in social learning, which is the final component of motivation.

Theory of Aesthetics Education

As a means of fostering intellectual and moral development, the philosophy of aesthetic education emphasizes the significance of incorporating art and aesthetics within the educational curriculum. According to Latta (2000), aesthetic education argues for incorporating art into educational institutions to foster a more profound comprehension and enjoyment of beauty and the influence that beauty has on the development of morality. Within the framework of the religious art project, which is intended to provide students with an engaging experience, aesthetic education occupies a key role. Instead of merely taking in the message the artist is trying to convey, the audience is urged to respond artistically and imaginatively when interacting with religious art (Onibere & Ottuh, 2024). By allowing participants to reinterpret and internalize the moral vision embedded in the art, this creative response ultimately contributes to the development of moral reformation. When viewed in this light, aesthetic education is an extremely important factor in releasing the potential of religious art to mold and grow moral comprehension (Townsend & Ryan, 2010). Especially in the framework of an innovative interactive religious artwork project being implemented in Nigeria's higher educational institutions, aesthetic instruction can serve as a powerful paradigm for activating the moral power of religious art.

Beginning in the 1970s, cultism, which is a term that describes secret groups that are motivated by a desire for authority and control, has developed into a widespread issue in Nigerian universities. It is possible to link the reduction in ethical behaviors among students to a more widespread organizational failure of moral development and an imbalance between professional education and moral vision. In response to broader appeals for the moral reconstruction of young people, a religious communication project should emphasize the design and construction of novel interactive religious artworks (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). This is done to address the moral deficit that is present among students who are involved in cultism. These artworks, created through a collaborative effort between artists and theologians, will be shown at a space on the Church of Nigeria campus in Zaria that is located within the campus itself. Participants will be led around the artworks by student assistants who have received specialized training. For Rusmiyati (2020), attractive learning materials such as the Spiderman media actively engage learners throughout the learning process, because they are useful and efficient teaching tools. Learning from "Spiderman" media emphasizes on students' playing and responding to questions about the images, therefore fostering education via play. They will engage in creative reactions and discussions that have the purpose of unpacking and reinterpreting the moral perspective that is embedded in the artworks.

METHODS

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating a qualitative approach (Waldmeir et al., 2017). It employs a narrative inquiry technique that enables

the researcher to investigate and convey lived experiences about acts, events, situations, and phenomena based on their interpretations and understandings (Aremu, 2014; Smith, 2018). Narrative inquiry effectively integrates concepts, thoughts, and experiences from diverse fields, including design, visual arts, the interaction between people and computers, religion, philosophy, and ethics, enhancing the communication of interactive art or design projects. This research also uses action research methods to examine the efficacy of interactive religious art pieces in reforming the moral standards of student cultists in Nigerian educational institutions. Personal interviews and observations are performed with 250 selected participants to evaluate the efficacy of the art pieces in moral reformation. In this way, it examines students at selected Nigerian higher education institutions who are classified as cultists based on their association with cultic organizations. The selected institutions include Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka-Yaba, Lagos, University of Lagos, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, and Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, among others, owing to their engagement in cultism. These chosen comprehensive research approaches improve the thesis of this paper, which is the promotion of moral transformation among student cultists in Nigerian higher education institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultism and Student Cultist in Nigerian Higher Institutions

Cultism, within the Nigerian context, denotes clandestine organizations whose actions are detrimental to the best interests and welfare of the broader populace. Student cults or cultists at Nigeria's tertiary institutions have affiliated with various cults influenced by socio-cultural variables (Ogbondah & Ewor, 2014). Student cultism has emerged as a pervasive epidemic within the Nigerian higher education system, jeopardizing and eroding the fundamental principles of education. It directly or indirectly compromises academic excellence by injuring or killing academic personnel or students who dissent, compelling some students to discontinue their studies, coercing the annulment of student elections, denying students representation and agency in decision-making processes, and mandating the transfer of political party-affiliated students who violate their code of conduct or academic staff, or subjecting them to injury or death (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). Cultism is deemed socially unhealthy due to its ideas and activities that deviate from societal norms. Academic conceptions of cultism encompass students who are members of or engage in cult activities. Cultism is frequently linked to concepts such as secret society, fraternity, and brotherhood, which denote social groups that are clandestine and exclusive, typically deviating from the prevailing cultural norms (Ogbondah&Ewor, 2014). In Nigeria, student cultism poses a substantial challenge to the higher education system, emerging as a pervasive disease that jeopardizes and erodes the integrity of educational foundations. To effectively

address the problem of student cults, it is essential to comprehend the nature of cults and the strategies for managing them inside Nigeria's higher education institutions.



Fig. 1: Portraying cultism as a dangerous phenomenon (Sikiru Obarayese , 2021)

Cultism, originating in Africa, has developed over time and is shaped by socio-political settings and trends. The proliferation of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria has resulted in the expansion of ancient cultic activities. The proliferation of secret organizations during the colonial era facilitated the advent of contemporary cultism. Cults sprang from social entities such as nightclubs, welfare societies, and brotherhood organizations that, by the 1980s, had devolved into violence and promoted terror in society (Ogbondah & Ewor, 2014). The trend extended beyond academic environments, as the political instability during Nigeria's transition from military to civilian governance fostered the spread of cults within colleges and institutions. Formed initially with benign intentions, student cultists have evolved into formidable entities afflicting academia (Longsdorf, 2018). These groups consist of students from higher education institutions who pledge to prioritize group interests over genuine endeavors. Their expressions encompass membership enumeration, overt intimidation, violence, and initiation and recruitment operations.

Student Cultism in Relation to Interactive Religious Art

At a workshop held at the Bassin de la Villette in Paris in 1990, the idea of cultism in interactive religious art first surfaced (Pattenden, 2017). Cultism is the dedication to religious or secular goals, ideas, and customs. Interactive religious art falls into several groups, such as acts of devotion, such as believing in supernatural powers or a mystical presence, performances that are affected by viewers, different kinds of pilgrimages, and cases of idolatry, the use of inappropriate objects in worship, and iconoclasm. These pieces can be considered acts of devotion, with artists performing in priestly positions, causing offence by openly attacking current devotions, or accusing the artist of sacrilege. Interactive religious art's cultistic quality can exist without God,

subverting conventional wisdom and encouraging group or cultist reactions (Mullins, 1994). Many times, based on their views, cults consist of members who exhibit their ideas via artistic relics and rituals. There can be significant issues with dysfunctional or misled cults.

What religious or aesthetic needs foster cults, and how best to propagate these ideas? Art, movies, and visualization media can all be part of cult-based ceremonies aiming to produce emotional reactions and engage the audience (Gabriel, 2021). Since they convey a feeling of contiguous beauty, cultic ideals are fundamental in the core values of religion, art, and culture (Mullins, 1994). Art and production might concentrate outside extension production as human scope grows, but their interdependence depends on an awareness of the interactions among cultish and religious groups. Often adopting practices and techniques of ritual experience, art has been a significant part of human civilization (Edelman, 2018). States of consciousness in line with religious dedication and experience can be created from artwork, music, architecture, sculpture, and song without turning to belief in a deity, moral precept, or living experience of the supernatural. Fundamentally, beauty is a subjective response to objective attributes that, taken together, inspire joy, respect, and transcendence.

Although no definition of beauty exists, every society finds aesthetic value. Everyone interacts uniquely with items, people, or events in an aesthetic culture. Common cultural institutions employ seductive strategies, including theatre, dance, poetry, and music, to control desire and conduct over time. Technological features such as stability, homogeneity, control, refractibility, and malleability create and maintain domestic, public, and recreational settings. Western society sometimes perceives cosmology as a distinction between artistic or emotional understanding of life and scientific understanding of reality (Gabriel, 2021). However, many civilizations have cosmology connected to belief systems perpendicular to religious ones that define reality and personal experience together. For a significant conversation between a people's perspective and their daily lived experience, a living cycle of meaning calls for transformation or "revitalization" throughout time.

Interactive Religious Art and Nigerian Higher Education

The emergence of worldwide diversity of religions, the increasing number of artists and their creations on campuses, and advancements in technology have facilitated chances for religious and spiritual involvement among students. Research indicates that the religious participation of students has declined; nonetheless, many continue to seek and discover spirituality in religious venues (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). Religious leaders are progressively utilizing the arts to connect with students and include them in spiritual pursuits. Religious art represents one of humanity's oldest encounters with art, linked to individuals' spiritual and religious impulses. Art is categorized as spiritual, religious, or divine, according to the concept of the Divine (Asue & Kajo, 2018). Religious art can evoke a profound understanding of religious beliefs and experiences, presenting an understanding of beliefs in an experiential rather than propositional

manner. Interactive artistic creations can alter the religious atmospheres shown in the work of art to engage the audience with its spiritual dimensions, resulting in a religious experience for the viewers. This indicates the need to explore participatory religious art as a means for the moral regeneration of student cultists.

Cultism has been a contentious problem in Nigerian higher-learning institutions, as it contradicts education's fundamental purpose and national progress. Cult-related activities are linked to numerous vices, such as corruption, prostitution, political violence, examination fraud, and homicide (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). The National Universities Commission (NUC) has confirmed that these vices jeopardize the viability and survival of educational institutions (Ogbondah & Ewor, 2014). Moral reformation is essential for salvaging offenders from the moral decline caused by poor ethical upbringing and an immoral lifestyle. By investigating the capacity of interactive religious art for ethical transformation, higher education institutions can sustain avenues for spiritual and religious involvement among students. According to Melendez (2011), art is integral to moral formation, as it can explore, interrogate, exemplify, and establish ethical ideas. Art can embody sentiments, reveal emotions, imply positive or negative feelings, and manifest nebulous emotions into tangible form.

The concept of justice as atonement originates from a narrative, and art should be integral to moral advancement. Interactive religious art can intentionally influence the ethical reform of student cultists by necessitating audience participation, transforming them into artwork co-creators (Longsdorf, 2018). This event is thought to induce a moral transformation. Interactive art and technology converge to establish a novel genre that amplifies audience interaction by utilizing methods that detect audience behaviors and generate reactions, thus creating feedback loops among the viewership, the artist, and the artwork (Her & Hamlyn, 2010). In this sense, digital technology offers many immersive experiences that engage audiences in installations or virtual places, expanding engagement possibilities beyond physical participation. The increasing prevalence of interactive media art exhibits in Nigerian higher education raises concerns over the efficacy of audience involvement following the first intrigue of interaction. Valuable artworks must be evaluated to ascertain how meaningful experiences are elicited through interaction with media art such as presented in figures 2 and 3 below. Unanticipated opportunities exist to foster significant engagement through the interplay of audiences, artists, and artworks and examine the construction of meaning. Procedures that initiate meaning-making processes can serve as valuable references for subsequent inquiries.



Fig. 2: Interactive media art (Itunu Azeez Kareem, 2024)



Fig. 3: Environmental discipline (Chidinma Solomon, 2022)

Cultism in Nigerian colleges and universities adversely influences numerous graduates through their affiliation with various student cults, resulting in a bleak portrayal of society's moral fiber. Student cults frequently entail an intense allegiance to an individual, concept, or object; in the Nigerian context, students may not always adhere to religious beliefs. Ogbondah and Ewor (2014) state that the threat of cultism in Nigerian public institutions of learning results in tragic consequences, including unnecessary loss of life, resource wastage, disruption of academic schedules, funerals in place of celebrations, periods of mourning instead of educational instruction, and places of darkness rather than centers of enlightenment. Religious art interaction illustrates the transformation of cultists from moral blindness to enlightened understanding. Investigating the potential of media-based art to enhance meaningful engagement can advance moral growth and cultivate a more inclusive and courteous society.

Cultism Impacts on Students and Society

Violence as well as harassment is the two most prominent markers of cult activity on campus. Campus communities exist in perpetual apprehension of death threats or harm to themselves and the tranquility of the community (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). The effect of cult groups is frequently emphasized through risks to personal safety, communal harmony, or an examination of their aggressive agendas (Turner, 2007). To sustain cult memberships, initiation and recruitment activities must be conducted, frequently involving coercion or the application of torture and violent methods. Individuals seeking admission into cults are frequently manipulated or lured into compromising circumstances, compelling them to join the cult or endure public disgrace. Comprehending the forms of cultism on campus is essential for grasping the prevalence of student cultism. Student cults in Nigeria are associated with atrocities, violence, and intimidation, marked by increasing incidences of violent confrontations between competing factions and homicides (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). Cult groups have also perpetrated activities like armed robbery, kidnapping, incineration of examination question papers, harassment of workers, and assaults on campus prostitution venues (Ottuh & Aitufe, 2014). Notwithstanding their professed aims of offering support systems for students and improving academic performance, cult groups have perpetrated violent and coercive actions against their peers.

The discussion regarding cultism in Nigerian higher education institutions frequently emphasizes abstract concepts, primarily consisting of statistics surveys or theoretical studies that do not adequately reflect the actual consequences of cult-related violence in the daily lives of students. Nonetheless, an analysis of the particular expressions of violence associated with cultism is necessary. Cults generally enlist new members via "friendship" groups or associations under various aliases.

The recruitment strategy typically commences in the student's inaugural year, as they constitute a susceptible demographic readily influenced by senior students. First-year students face pressure to join these groups shortly after the commencement of the academic year, frequently accompanied by promises of various forms of assistance. As efforts to join the groups intensify, the enthusiasm and activity of the group are correspondingly amplified. Individuals who refuse to participate in the group's social circles are frequently labeled "snakes," fostering a deceptive illusion of welcome and belonging (Ushe, 2019). Subsequently, a prospective recruit is designated for companionship with an established member, sometimes termed a "brother" or "sister." This association endures from one week to one semester, during which the recruit is acquainted with fundamental group concepts but is predominantly uninformed about its principal operations. Initiatives are undertaken to engage the recruit in activities deceptively portrayed as innocuous amusement while gradually familiarizing them with the procedures that culminate in their induction. Upon a recruit succumbing to the cult's influence, an initiation date is established, typically after the conclusion of the cult's annual ceremonies (Adelola, 1997). The rituals and ceremonies associated with an initiate's indoctrination are clandestine and frequently macabre. By the time the recruit

is ultimately presented for initiation, they have become mentally ensnared, and rejection to participate may signify death. Inducted members frequently engage in a confession spree, recounting their disreputable past actions, sometimes related to criminal conduct.

Cultism significantly impacts students and society, adversely influencing academic achievement and leading to a drop in educational standards. Cult activities foster an environment of dread, anxiety, harassment, persecution, and intimidation, deterring students' active engagement in academia. In civilizations where cult activities thrive, social and political turmoil leads to instability, chaos, abuse of power, oppression, and authoritarian traits. Cultism engenders a pernicious cycle of violence, wherein aggressive cult actions provoke retaliatory threats and violent reactions from external parties. Cult rivalry is closely linked to safety issues since students experience feelings of insecurity and see a necessity for enhanced security measures owing to these rivalries (Dzurgba, 2004). Cultism engenders pervasive insecurity and violence among families and communities, as several cult members' hail from the same familial and local backgrounds. The ethicality of cult families is scrutinized, and individuals who do not openly endorse the cults encounter persecution and intimidation.

Notwithstanding the denunciation of cultism, the inquiry persists as to whether it can be curtailed without confronting the socio-political difficulties within society. Comprehending the ramifications of cultism is essential for proposing strategies to address the issue and rehabilitate students engaged in cult activities. This knowledge can foster awareness and develop a more favorable environment for schooling. Cult activities can cause kids to neglect academic pursuits and prioritize endeavors that may adversely affect their marks. Membership in cult groups significantly altered academic performance, with inadequate intellectual engagement as a contributing factor (Agetue & Ogodu, 2022). The compulsion to participate in the initiation and associated activities made it nearly unfeasible for students to attend lectures, resulting in absences and diminished concentration on critical academic responsibilities. Cultism also subjected cultists to the misappropriation of their time, as they became excessively preoccupied with non-academic pursuits. A culture of fear stemming from the authoritarianism of certain cult groups deterred some students from pursuing essential academic support from their peers, resulting in academic deficiencies. This culminated in poor performance in school, as the absence of academic support in a course resulted in a deficiency of earned credit units.

The academic success of students who joined members was, on average, more likely to decline. Experience of ex-cultists, non-cultists, as well as the academic environment shapes the view. Some students miss school during cult events out of attack-related anxiety, which results in additional years in higher education. Some cult members influence their academics by using their money to cover responsibilities to the group (Mediayanose, 2016). This view emphasizes the possible bad influence of cult-related activities on academic achievement of students. Affiliation with a cult group, as well as the academic achievement of students, are mutually exclusive pursuits. Cultism resulted in impaired focused attention, depression, and stress or anxiety. Experiencing excessive academic pressure was a source of stress and anxiety. Alongside various

scholastic failures, sure pupils attributed emotional breakdowns to cultism. Cultism in Nigerian higher institutions has generated security and safety concerns. Incidents of violent confrontations between student cultists as well as non-cultists have transformed specific universities into sites of intimidation rather than conducive learning environments. This has fostered a menacing environment for students, as various cult groups remain vigilant, maybe awaiting an opportunity to perpetrate violence in retribution for previous assaults (Osha, 2000). University administrations must devise measures to reestablish order on campuses and tackle the increasing issues stemming from cult membership among students. Higher education institutions may be perceived as incubators of social evils, potentially leading to their rejection by future generations. The apprehension pertains to the potential consequences for society if these institutions cease to exist or function merely nominally.

The Impact of Interactive Religious Art on Moral Reformation

Student cultism constitutes a global threat within higher educational institutions. However, it is particularly prevalent in Nigerian public universities, notwithstanding the government's and other stakeholders' strenuous efforts to eliminate it. Cult activities among students are marked by violence, armed conflicts, sexual abuse, intimidation, substance misuse, academic dishonesty, engagement in political thuggery, and a decline in moral integrity, as well as the eradication of trained and disciplined intellects (Ottuh & Aitufe, 2014). These contrasting phenomena primarily stem from moral decay, necessitating moral reformation via moral education and using art as an effective instrument for interactive moral education. Religion serves as a valuable medium for moral instruction, thereby prompting the investigation of interactive religious art (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). Higher educational institutions are anticipated to serve as incubators for ethical values, instruction, and the socialization of disciplined intellects.

Student cultism constitutes an issue within the Nigerian educational system, driven by factors such as poverty, population expansion, and disintegration of the family unit, unemployment, inadequate governance, religious influences, miscarriage of justice, moral depravity, peer pressure, and parental neglect. Solutions to cultism encompass advocacy, immediate arrest and prosecution, disciplining wayward students, alleviating poverty, enhancing infrastructure, changing religious education, and including students in policy formulation (Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018). Religion is essential for the moral reformation of student cultists, and examining interactive religious art provides a method for moral teaching. Religion establishes moral codes that govern individual and societal behavior to promote ethical standards (Ottuh, 2020). Implementing the aforementioned solutions will enhance the relevance and efficacy of religious education, hence facilitating the investigation of art as a medium for participatory religious instruction. The experimental and artistic design of the research demonstrated that the chosen interactive religious artworks were practically functional, successful, and impactful in achieving the intended moral reformation among student cultists.

The moral transformation through the participatory religious art installations was progressively achieved, as corroborated by the diverse testimonials of the participants. For instance, one of the students states that his participation as a member of the Forum for Christian Art Students in his institution has help him and other members to overcome menace of campus cultism. Another student (an ex-cultist), testified that when he was a cultist, his cumulative grade point average CGPA was as low as 2. 06 in his 100 and 200 levels, however, after he left the cult his subsequent rehabilitation, his CGPA has improved to 3.48 and 3.81 in his 300 and 400 levels respectively.



Fig. 4: The power of choice is love (sourced: whitehotmagazine.com)

Figure 3 above is a painting by Henri Abraham Univers that is a reflective journey of life. It provides a time of creative transcendence and contemplation, detached from the clamor of the external environment. The interactive religious art pieces functioned as a creative intervention, awakening consciousness and divine engagement with God's word for cultist students. Numerous student cultists in Nigerian higher education institutions admitted their participation in dangerous, unethical, and nefarious behaviors while influenced by cultism.

Nevertheless, certain witnesses, who were deeply entrenched in cultism, had not fully extricated themselves while acknowledging significant possibilities for liberation, transformation, and salvation through their interaction with the religious art installations. Interactive religious art practice provides a cohesive and comprehensive integration of faith, religiosity, spirituality, and the visual arts (Hodges, 2018). This contemporary strategy effectively addresses the activities of cults and secret societies, fostering moral reformation and a renewed dedication to faith-based life. Researchers, scholars, artists, youth workers, and educators across diverse cultural and societal contexts may explore interactive religious art practices to facilitate the moral transformation of delinquent young people, misguided students, secret society affiliates, and individuals engaged in activities contrary to peaceful ethical living. Religious art's narrative and modern and uplifting nature should enable students to validate moral

themes without any preconceived notions or prejudices (Longsdorf, 2018). The combination of personal contemplation, deconstruction, and the visibility of moral reformation should be included.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the potential of interactive religious art to address the moral decline among student cultists in Nigerian higher education institutions. The research investigated themes including cultism, interactive religious art, moral transformation, and student cultists. It discovered that cultism originated in Nigeria's tertiary institutions to promote camaraderie, safeguard students, and advocate against societal injustices. Although cultism was first conceived as a means to advance social equality, freedom, and justice, modern cult groups are beset by unethical actions that undermine its foundational aims. Student cultism is often cited as a primary factor contributing to many vices afflicting higher educational institutions. The substantial and timely research contributed to existing knowledge, society, and curriculum development in higher education institutions. The issue of cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning has endured for decades, hindering the socioeconomic, political, moral, and academic progress of the system of education.

Cultism is ascribed to numerous variables, and various strategies have been implemented to mitigate the issue. Nevertheless, none of the methods have substantially improved the problem, thus requiring the investigation of a new strategy. The reformation is anticipated to occur in three phases: recognizing unethical practices, establishing moral principles, and implementing a virtuous lifestyle. The various phases of reformation are intended to be realized through participatory religious art forms that illustrate hereditary cultism and religious views on morality. Future research should investigate the efficacy of interactive religious artwork in the moral regeneration of cultist persons, as well as other demographic groups, including students in secondary schools, civil service employees, and younger individuals influenced by cultism through various means. Subsequent research may evaluate the efficacy of interactive religious art in moral transformation concerning additional vices or sins, such as substance misuse or academic dishonesty that afflict Nigerian higher education institutions.

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