

Assessing the Effects of Deviance Perception on Students' Deviant Behaviours in Federal Universities of Southern Nigeria

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The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of student's perception of deviance on their deviant behaviours in Federal universities in southern Nigeria. This study used the descriptive survey as a design for the research study. The main instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. Multi-staged sampling (made up of purposive, simple random, stratified and accidental processes) was adopted in selecting the representative sample size of 1,524 students drawn from the population, out of which 723 were males and 768 were females. Data were analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test the hypothesis at 5% levels of significance. The findings show that students'

perception of deviance had a significant influence on students' deviant behaviours. Conclusion was drawn that the higher the perception of deviance, the higher the level of deviant behaviour. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that efforts be made by all stakeholders to discourage those who have positive perception of deviance since the higher the perception of deviance, the higher the level of deviant behaviour they display.

Keywords: Students' perception, deviance, deviant behaviours, university students, morality

INTRODUCTION

Deviance from a sociological perspective is a behaviour that violates social norms and values. It is also described as actions or behaviours that are contrary to the standards of conducts or expectations of a group or society. Deviance is a complex concept which has no universally accepted definition but vary from one society to the other. Deviant behaviours can take the form of criminal, bad or odd behaviour such as examination malpractice, armed robbery, murder, assaults, prostitution, pre-marital sex and several others. Studies by Denga and Denga, (2011), Okosun, (2010) and Egwuyenga, (2009) rightly attest to the fact that although the Nigerian society is very complex, one thing is sure, viz, that all cultural groups and settings have many forms of standardized behaviour, and shared moral perception and expectations which define deviance and that deviance can only be discussed within the boundary of morality. Wikipedia (2013), in their research, traced the origin of the root word of morality (from the Latin word 'moralis' implies; manner, character, proper behaviour of a person in a society) is a sense of behavioural conduct that differentiates intention, decisions, and action between those that are good (or right) and bad (or wrong).

Deviance related issues are of great concern to stake holders in education due to the variety of definitions given to this concept, and based on perceptions. People, are taking different positions on a variety of issues, ranging from war to sexually related issues, examination malpractice, assault, substance use etc., at times the stance taken is related to dictionary terms of what is right and wrong (morality). Closely related to morality is the concept of "perception". As a cognitive process, this takes place in organisms leading to its awareness, organization and association of stimuli received from the sensory organs. The difference in organisms' perception has been attributed to a number of factors which include the perceivers' upbringing (which is determined by one's cultural background i.e. norms, tradition, and moral code) previous experience, the perceiver's need, etc (Eteng, 2015).

Theoretical framework

Sykes and Matza (1957) deviance perception/Neutralization theory

Sykes and Matza (1957), neutralization theory explains how deviants perceive and justify their deviant behaviours by adjusting the definitions of their actions and by explaining to themselves and others the lack of guilt of their actions in particular situations. According to Ronel, (2011) and Sykes and Matza, (1957) identified five different types of rationalizations. That is to say, these are ways deviants perceive and also justify their actions, the denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners and appeal to higher loyalties. The denial of responsibilities is the argument that, the deviant was helplessly propelled into the deviance and that under same circumstances, any other person would resort to similar action. The denial of injury is the argument that he (deviant) did not hurt anyone, and thus the deviance is not morally wrong, because of the fundamental belief that the action caused no harm to other individuals or to the society. The denial of the victim is the argument that possible individuals on the receiving end of the deviance were not injured, but rather experienced righteous force, due to the victims' lack of virtue or morals, which may be seen as retribution (Matza, 2009). The condemnation of the condemners is the act by which the deviant accuses authority figures or victims for having the tendency to be equally deviant, and as a result, hypocrites. Finally, the appeal to higher loyalties is the belief that there are loyalties and values that go beyond the confines of the law, friendship and traditions are more important to the deviant than legal boundaries. Neutralization theory therefore says how and why an individual rationalize and redefine deviance. This is applicable to students who engage in deviant behaviours such as examination malpractice, truancy, armed robbery, bullying among others. As far as they are concerned they are helping themselves they justify their actions by saying that whatever the case may be, as long as they did not hurt anyone they have not done anything that warrants the condemnation they are receiving from the society and significant others. Some deviants even go further to apportion blame to the system or the society.

Statement of problem

The problem of deviant behaviour as displayed in educational institutions in general and our tertiary institutions in particular, it is considered a menace worldwide. This is due to the fact that it poses a serious threat to teaching and learning defeating the purpose for which the schools are established. The magnitude of offences and the recurrent nature of deviance that plague our campuses have degenerated into a night mare. If the national goals of education must be achieve and, our expectation is a more progressive and prosperous society, then all hands must be on deck to check deviant behaviour in our institutions of learning. Moreover the problem is compounded considering the fact that the

perpetuators of the deviance have a way of 'explaining off' or justifying their deviant behaviours by adjusting the definitions of their actions. Sometimes they see deviance as a way of 'helping themselves'.

Purpose of study

Generally, the study seeks to examine the influence of students' perception on their deviant behaviours in the Federal Universities in Southern Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research question will guide the study;How does students' perception of deviance influence their deviant behaviours?

Statement of hypothesis

Based on the specific objective and research question used, the following null hypothesis is put forth to guide the study: Students' perception of deviance does not significantly influence their deviant behaviours.

Significance of studies

- (i) It will expose the cause of students' deviant behaviour.
- (ii) It will help all stake holders to understand the effects of deviance on the educational system in particular and the society at large.
- (iii) It will enlighten the public on the underlying issues as regards measures of control of students' deviant behaviour.

Scope of study

The study was design to cover students of the federal universities located within the southern region of Nigeria. Therefore, any generalization of the study findings should be limited to the area or to other areas with similar features.

Limitations of study

- (i) The major limitation of this study is that deviance is a relative concept. In this study, the sociological perspective of the concept was applied.
- (ii) Only federal universities were utilised for the study, the result may not apply to both state and private universities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design. The study area is South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria which

comprises of six (6) states namely, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. The population of this study was 69,152 students (33,281 males and 35,871 females), 20,289, 17,139, 16,014 and 15,710 from the Universities of Benin, Calabar, Port Harcourt and Uyo respectively. A multi-staged sampling (made up of purposive, simple random, stratified and accidental processes) was adopted in selecting the sample of 1524 students. The main instrument used for data collection in this study was questionnaire titled 'Deviance Perception and Students Deviant Behaviours Questionnaire' (DEPERSEB). The 32 items instrument was constructed using four point Likert type scale to guide response. The content and face validity was ascertain by experts. To determine the reliability of the research instrument, a trial test was conducted using the Cronbach Coefficient Alpha procedure. The reliability estimates for the different subscales ranged from 0.68 to 0.74. The instrument of data collection was administered with the help of some research assistances. At the end of the exercise, out of 1,524 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 1,491 were successfully completed and usable. The statistical analysis technique deployed to test the hypothesis was One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

RESULTS

Hypothesis: Students' perception of deviance does not significantly influence their deviant behavior.

In this hypothesis, the independent variable was students' perception of deviance, while the dependent variable was students' deviant behaviour, which were five in this study namely; sexually related deviant behaviour, assault/bullying, drug abuse, examination malpractice and truancy. On the individual variable, the respondents were classified into three groups based on their scores on the variable of students' perception of deviance. Those who scored half standard deviation below the mean (12.00) were grouped under "level of low perception". Those who scored between half standard deviation below and above the mean were grouped under moderate level of perception; and those who scored above half standard deviation above the mean were group under high level of perception. The statistical analysis technique deployed to test this hypothesis was One-way analysis of variances (ANOVA). The results of the analysis were presented in (Tables 1 and 2). While the groups mean values were presented in (Table 1), the actual results of ANOVA were presented in (Table 2). The sizes, mean and standard deviation of the three group of respondents based on their scores on students' perception of deviance are shown in (Table 1). The result of comparing the three groups means values using AVOVA are shown in (Table 2). The comparison yielded

F-values of 10.361, 6.653, 2.197, 2.455 and 6.949 respectively for sexually-related deviant behaviour, assault/bullying, drug abuse, examination malpractice and truancy of these F-values, only the ones for sexually-related deviant behaviour (10.361), assault/bullying (6.653) and truancy (6.949) were higher than the critical F-value of 3.00 at 0.05 level of significance, given 2 and 1488 degrees of freedom and were therefore significant at 0.05 level. With these results, the null hypothesis was rejected in those three cases, but not rejected in the other two cases of drug abuse and examination malpractice. This implied that students' perception of deviance has significance on students' deviant behaviour in the aspect of sexually-related deviant behaviour, assault/bullying and truancy, but it did not have significance in the aspects of drug abuse and examination malpractice. To further explore the pattern of the significance influence of students' perception of deviance on the three aspects of their deviant behaviour, Fishers' least significant difference (LSD) post hoc multiple mean comparison analysis were carried out and to the results of the analysis were presented in (Table 3).

The results of fishers LSD analysis shown in (Table 3) showed that for sexually – related deviants behavior, students with moderate and high levels of perception of deviance had significant higher level of deviant behavior than their counter parts with low level of perception of deviance ($t = - 2.85, p < 0.05$; $t = - 4.50, p < 0.05$ respectively). However, students with moderate and high levels of perception of deviance were not significantly different in their levels of deviance behaviour ($t = - 1.65, p > 0.05$). Concerning assault/ bullying, (Table 3) showed that students with moderate level of perception of deviance and those with high level of perception of deviance displayed significant higher levels of assault/bullying than students with low level of perception of deviance ($t = - 2.29, p < 0.05$; $t = 3.64, p < 0.05$ respectively). However, students with moderate level and those with high level of perception deviance were not significant different in their levels of assault/bullying displayed.

Concerning truancy, (Table 3) shows that students with high level of perception of deviance are significantly more truant than students with low level and those with moderate level of perception of deviance ($t = -3.32, p < 0.05, t = -2.94, p < 0.05$ respectively). However, the level of truancy displayed by students with low level, and that displayed by students with moderate level of perception of deviance were not significant ($t = -0.41, p > 0.05$). Generally, testing hypothesis, showed that students' perception of deviance has a significant influence on their deviant behaviour in the aspects of sexually related deviant behaviour, assault/bullying and truancy; and no significant influence on students' deviant behaviour of drug abuse and examination malpractice. The higher the perception of deviance by students (i.e. the more they accept deviance as a way of life), the

Table 1. Group sizes, means and standard deviation of respondents' deviant behavior based on their perception of deviance.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Sexually deviant Behaviour	Low Perception	421	9.51	2.243
	Moderate Perception	501	9.92	2.065
	High Perception	569	10.14	2.227
	Total	1491	9.89	2.192
Assault/Bullying	Low Perception	421	9.52	2.088
	Moderate Perception	501	9.85	2.100
	High Perception	569	10.03	2.309
	Total	1491	9.82	2.187
Drug Abuse	Low Perception	421	9.45	2.023
	Moderate Perception	501	9.57	2.132
	High Perception	569	9.74	2.312
	Total	1491	9.60	2.175
Examination Malpractice	Low Perception	421	9.77	2.074
	Moderate Perception	501	9.64	1.969
	High Perception	569	9.91	2.020
	Total	1491	9.78	2.020
Truancy	Low Perception	421	8.80	1.861
	Moderate Perception	501	8.85	1.752
	High Perception	569	9.19	1.872
	Total	1491	8.97	1.837

Table 2. Analysis of variance of influences of students' perception of deviance their deviant behaviour.

Variable	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-ratio	Sig level
Sexually-related Deviant Behaviour	Between groups	98.344	2	49.172	10.361	0.000
	Within groups	7061.951	1488	4.746		
	Total	7160.295	1490			
Assault/Bullying	Between groups	63.170	2	31.585	6.653	0.001
	Within Groups	7064.791	1488	4.748		
	Total	7127.961	1490			
Drug abuse	Between groups	20.698	2	10.349	2.191	0.112
	Within Groups	7026.861	1488	4.722		
	Total	7047.559	1490			
Examination Malpractice	Between groups	20.001	2	10.000	2.455	0.086
	Within Groups	6062.403	1488	4.074		
	Total	6082.404	1490			
Truancy	Between groups	46.512	2	23.256	6.949	0.01
	Within Groups	4979.674	1488	3.347		
	Total	5026.186	1490			

*Significant ($P < 0.05$); critical $F = 3.00$; $df = 2 \text{ \& } 1488$.

higher the level of deviant behaviour they displayed. This constitutes the answer to the research question.

DISCUSSION

The findings in the study revealed that students' perception of deviance had a significant impact on students' deviant behaviour. This finding is in agreement with the result of a study reported by Ngban, (2002) which was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between students' moral perception of deviance and their disciplined behaviour - revealed a significant relationship between students discipline and

their moral perception of deviance of sexually-related deviant behaviour, assault/bullying and truancy, but did not have significant influence in the aspects of drug abuse and examination malpractice. The higher the perception of deviance by students (the more they accept deviance as a way of life), the higher the level of deviant behaviour they display. In consonance with the findings of Brener *et al.*(2005), who argued that the perception of violent exposure led to verbal and physical abuse amongst learner which, unwittingly led to anti-social behavior having studied the perception, experiences and observations of a group of students on school violence in Lesotho. The reason may be that individuals are product of their environment as have been argued by theorists

Table 3. Fishers' least significant difference (LSD) analysis of the significant influence of students' perception of deviance on their deviant behavior.

Variable	Levels of perception of deviance	Low (N=421)	Moderate (N=501)	High (N=569)
Sexually– related deviant behavior	Low	9.51 ^a	-0.41 ^b	-0.63
	Moderate	-2.85 ^c	9.92	-0.22
	High	-4.50 [*]	-1.65	10.14
		MS _w = 4.746		
Assault/ bullying	Low	9.52 ^a	-0.33 ^b	-0.51
	Moderate	-2.29 ^c	9.85	-0.17
	High	-3.64 [*]	-1.27	10.03
		MS _w =4.748		
Truancy	Low	8.80 ^a	-0.05 ^b	-0.39
	Moderate	-0.41 ^c	8.85	-0.33
	High	-3.32 [*]	-2.94 [*]	9.19
		MS _w =3.347		

a– Group mean are presented along the diagonal

b– Mean differences are presented above the diagonal

c– Fishers t- values are measured below the diagonal

* t - Value is sig at 0.05 level (critical t=1.96)

MS_w- within group cvariance

like Bandura due to the ability of learners to imitate people.

Similarly, Koth *et al.*(2008) conducted a research to examine the effect of students' perception of deviance and the rationale for cheating. Findings shows that though 85% of the students disagree that cheating was justified yet 83% of students admitted cheating at one point or the other in their assessment or examination for various reasons. On the other hand this study disagreed with studies of Becker and Ulstad, (2007) they carried out a study on students' moral perception of deviant behavior. The result of their study showed that students' moral perception of deviant behaviour was a strong predator of student level of cheating.

The above line of argument is so probably because people give variety of definitions based on their perceptions on morality related issues. People are taking different positions on a variety of issues, strike actions, public protest, assaults or bullying abortion to mention a few, at times the stand taken is related to dictionary terms of what is right and wrong. Findings from studies (Paul, 2005; Peterson and Martin, 2004) showed that in many respects, moral perception and the rationale behind deviant behaviour as viewed by the perpetrators is like a moving target, with people changing their positions in various issues. These researchers insist that no moral code can dispense without a religious basis.

Conclusion

As a matter of fact the issue of students' perception of deviance is the key that can be used to unlock the mystery behind the menace of students' deviant

behaviour. This is because as long as a deviant sees what he or she is doing as a way of helping "him or herself out", and once the perpetrators seem to attach much 'benefit' from their dealings, then, it will be difficult if not impossible to arrest the situation. It is very natural for one to bring in the current predicament the country is facing today the issue of insurgency, resulting to insecurity and massive destruction of lives and property.

Recommendations

- (i) Enlightenment campaign in the form of conferences, talks and workshops should be organised for counsellors, school management staff, parents, students etc.
- (ii) Students need to be exposed to causes, effects, dangers and ways of curbing deviant behaviour through improving on existing values on citizenship education.
- (iii) Improve security by mounting up surveillance cameras at susceptible places.
- (iv) There should be a general strategic policy document to serve as a guide for all educational institutions.
- (v) A collaborative effort is required to curb the hydra-headed menace of the effects of indiscipline in the school system.

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