

Culturally Responsive Leadership among University Students in Kwara State University Malete, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines culturally responsive leadership among university student union leaders in Kwara State, Nigeria, focusing on how student leaders address the needs of a culturally diverse student population. The research explores four main areas: critical self-reflection, formulation of culturally sensitive programmes, inclusive student engagement, and involvement of parents and the wider community. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 300 undergraduate students at Kwara State University through a structured questionnaire. Findings revealed a moderate level of responsiveness in areas such as student advocacy, orientation programmes, and communication. However, the level of engagement with parents and communities was notably low. While student leaders showed efforts in promoting student welfare, gaps remain in fostering deeper cultural inclusion and interpersonal connection. The study highlights the importance of equipping student leaders with the skills and awareness needed to lead effectively in a diverse educational environment. It emphasises the need for more inclusive leadership practices, improved communication strategies, and stronger collaboration between student leaders, their peers, and external stakeholders to enhance student representation and overall institutional success.

Keywords: Cultural Responsive Leadership; Critical Self-Reflection; Culturally Sensitive Programmes; Inclusive Engagement of Students; Parents/Communities.

Introduction

Nigerian society's diversity has had a significant impact on cultural diversity in schools. This requires school leaders (including student leaders) to exercise effective leadership to meet the needs of all students from different backgrounds (Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, from the school's perspective, the leader plays a crucial role in determining the school's capacity to prioritize unity and culture in the development of school culture. The role of school leaders includes not only preserving students' culture and society, but also highlighting the variety of learning styles and the subsequent academic success of students in the field of education. Wong and Ng (2021) assert that one of school leaders' responsibilities is to assume the role of a teaching leader. According to Hallinger's (2003) study, a teacher who focuses on student learning requires school leaders to understand the diversity of student ability levels in order to improve student achievement through the teaching process. Effective leadership is an important factor in addressing the needs of all students, including marginalised, minority, and troubled students. A school is an organization that always strives to meet the needs of all students.

There have been several theories and models of leadership, such as traditional, transactional, transformational, social justice, educational leadership and culturally responsive among others. Researchers like Gameda and Lee, (2020); Nahavandi, (2006); Sergiovanni, (2007); Thanh et al., (2022) agreed that in the organizational context, the individual practice of leading and the desired outcome are to determine the type of leadership practiced. There are leadership practices that have general characteristics and focus specifically on culture (Ly, 2020). The changes that take place in the school context necessitate the tendency of leaders such as student union leaders to be not only inclusive but responsive to multicultural students' needs (Hollowell, 2019). Only culturally responsive leadership actively addresses issues of inequality, access, diversity, and social justice while advocating for change (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Lopez, 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Ryan, 2012).

Culturally responsive leadership is a leadership style that emphasises adaptability, flexibility and rapid responsiveness. It involves listening to and understanding the needs and concerns of those under your guidance and

adjusting your leadership approach to address those priorities and apprehensions (Okt, 2024). Culturally responsive leaders nurture and maintain high quality communication and build on stakeholders' inclusiveness. Culturally responsive leaders work to understand their own biases as well as pattern of discrimination and ament such (critically self-reflection). Such leaders also build relationship with communities (parents/community engagement) in order to enjoin their support, maximum cooperation and gain from their wealth of knowledge. Culturally responsive leaders maintain good communication network with the subject (formulation of culturally sensitive programmes,) and also involve the students in the decision making process (inclusive engagement of students) so that there decision doesn't meet resistance from the students.

The underlying theory for this study is Two-factor theory postulated by Herzberg (1967).He researched into the elements of jobs that make worker/subordinate/students either satisfied or dissatisfied. Herzberg therefore, labeled the factors that caused dissatisfaction "hygiene factors" and those that can bring about satisfaction as the "motivators". The dissatisfier or hygiene factors were dominated by interpersonal relations with supervisor or peers, salaries, working condition, personal life, technical supervision and company policy. The second sets that were called satisfiers or motivators include achievement opportunities, recognition, work itself, advancement and personal growth. Herzberg argues that, although presence of hygiene factors will not motivate people in an organisation, yet they must be present otherwise dissatisfaction will set in. He equally stated that if the motivator factors are not present, motivation will not be effective. Furthermore, Herzberg holds that work satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not antagonistic. The factors that lead to job satisfaction are the motivators only.

This theory can be applied in the school system in that, the union leader as the recognized leader of the undergraduate students has the responsibility to help student members, school management and community to get satisfaction and fulfilment of their needs and achieve objectives. The union leaders should remember to use the "motivator" by improving students' needs, recognition, advancement, personal growth as well as engaging community in decision making.

In the university system, student leadership are important elements in the development and maintenance of school culture (Hollowell, 2019). According to Irina and Karine (2021), the success in the education field of a country can only be measured through the achievements obtained by the educational organization in terms of the leadership of the school organization and the quality possessed by the students in the school organization. Bass and Riggio (2008) concur with this finding, asserting that effective leadership is characterized by a steadfast focus on addressing the needs of all students, without any bias. In this regard, the education sector today, particularly in university of Ilorin, with its diverse population of races, religions, and nationalities, urgently requires leaders capable of addressing the needs of students, through culturally responsive leadership practices that strongly emphasize justice and equality in education.

Student union leaders are usually elected students representatives assigned to different roles in order to take care of students affairs in the university system. They are usually elected to the position after rigorous democratic process that resembles that of the main stream politics. Since this study focusses on the cultural leadership among students, it is incumbent to examine the way that this union leaders carryout their leadership taken in to account the cultural diversity in the institution in terms of involvement in critical self-reflection, formulation of culturally sensitive programmes, inclusive engagement of students and parents/communities in their activities. This study therefore adopted the four main behaviors identified in the framework presented by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016), which are critical self-reflection; forming culturally sensitive programmes; inclusive school environments; and parent/community involvement.

Many researchers agree that in the organizational context, the individual practice of leading and the desired outcome are to determine the type of leadership practiced (Gemeda & Lee, 2020; Thanh et al., 2022). There are leadership practices that have general characteristics and focus specifically on culture (Ly, 2020). The changes that take place in the school context necessitate the tendency of leaders to be not only inclusive but responsive to multicultural students' learning and needs. Only culturally responsive leadership actively addresses issues of inequality, access, diversity, and social justice while

advocating for change (Khalifa, 2018). Effective leadership is required to make changes and ensure that all students have access to more engaging, inclusive, relevant, conducive, and quality school experiences and environments. School leaders need to adopt a leadership style that aligns with the school's situation, as they are constantly interacting with individuals who have emotions, such as students, teachers, and staff (Joseph et al., 2020). An appropriate leadership style can influence the behavior and attitude of school members, encouraging them to collaborate for the sake of organizational excellence.

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According to Khalifa (2018), school leaders must play an important role in maintaining cultural responsiveness in schools. In the study conducted, Khalifa(2018) also suggested that school leaders must set strategies or guide stakeholders who are not culturally responsive to accept the best approach to ensuring diversity in schools and culturally responsive students (Khalifa, 2018). In the context of this study, cultural responsive leadership involves student union leaders' involvement in critical self-reflection, formulation of culturally sensitive programmes, inclusive engagement of students and parents/communities in their activities. The study examined cultural responsive leadership in different dimensions like student union leaders' involvement in critical self-reflection, which involves the extent to which students' representatives evaluate their performance in order to improve their

performance in their assigned responsibilities towards becoming responsive leader.

Secondly the study investigated cultural responsive leadership in terms of student union leaders' formulation of culturally sensitive programmes, which is the extent to which students representatives organize programmes to communicate with the students that elected them Thirdly it was viewed in terms of student union leaders' inclusive engagement of students: is the extent to which students carry along other student in decision making process especially those that are critical to their well-being. Lastly, it was determined using student union leaders' involvement of parents/communities, which is the extent to which students representative carry the parents of students/community along in their activities and decision making process.

Culturally responsive leadership in schools requires union leaders to lead by encouraging and asking students to engage in social justice and form a school that involves the participation of all students. School leaders need to demonstrate exemplary attitudes and behaviors to increase confidence that schools are for all students. It is against this background that this study is carried out.

Statement of the Problem

The behaviour of leaders generally affects relationship or engagement of community. Thus, the behaviour of the student union leader counts a lot in students' engagement. The engagement between the student union leaders should be approachable, friendly, and fair in dealing with other students in order to improve engagement. In any social interaction, the need to understand each other's plans, activities, problems and prospects cannot be undervalued and this can only be achieved through effective communication, interpersonal relationship and participatory decision making. Numerous studies have been conducted on culturally responsive leadership. Among such studies is Victor (2021), who found out that culturally responsible leadership in schools involves leadership practices and strategies that develop a school environment that includes students and communities from diverse backgrounds. This leadership style includes caring, relationship building, and culturally responsive nurturing (Davy, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016). Davy (2016) asserts that school leaders who

practice culturally responsive leadership are ready to accept challenges in different communities and strive to set appropriate strategies and methods to create the involvement of all students in the school.

In many universities in Nigeria especially in Kwara State University, there were series of complain from the students that their representatives are not responsive enough to their worries, needs and agitations. Many of the students complained about lack of engagement or even action with the increment in school fees, transport fare and even hostel accommodation. These are just mare assumption which might have been discarded by proper engagement or involvement of other students by the union leaders. Nnabuo and Emenalo (2002) posit that, to avoid ugly situation like apathy, non-cooperation, tension and confrontation, constant petitions and violence, and lack of communication should never be allowed by the leaders.

In this study, Khalifa et al (2016) culturally responsive leadership framework, which introduces the four dimensions of culturally responsive leadership was identified. And to the best knowledge of researcher, there have been no researches in Nigeria so far that focused on the involvement in critical self-reflection, formulation of culturally sensitive programmes, inclusive engagement of students and parents/communities in their activities as measure of culturally responsive leadership, especially with focus on the student union leadership in university of Ilorin.. Therefore, this study filled the gaps left by the previous Scholars.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the cultural responsive leadership among university students in Kwara State. Specifically, the purpose includes; to

1. Investigate the level of student union leaders' involvement in social justice.
2. Examine the level of student union leaders' involvement in the formulation of culturally sensitive programmes
3. Assess the level of student union leaders' inclusive engagement of students
4. Investigate student union leaders' involvement of parents/community in their activities.

Research Questions

To guide this study, four research questions were set to guide the study

1. What is the level of student union leaders' involvement in critical self-reflection.
2. What is the level of student union leaders involvement in the formulation of culturally sensitive programmes
3. What is the level of student union leaders' inclusive engagement of students
4. What is the level of student union leaders' involvement of parents/community in their activities?

Methodology

The descriptive research design that was adopted for study. The Population of this study consist all 31,094 undergraduate students of the university (Registry, KWASU, 2025). Stratified sampling technique was used to segregate the number of students per faculty as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Sample Frame

Faculties	No of Lecturers	No of students	Sample size
Agriculture	44	3983	49
Education	52	4760	58
Environmental sciences	9	678	8
Management & social science	79	3232	40
Engineering and Technology	47	3091	38
Pure and Applied Sciences	117	5733	70
	5	156	3
	17	1179	14
Basic medical science	73	3074	38
Allied health science	21	2072	25
Arts	33	3137	38
Law			
Total	398	31,093	381

Research Advisor (2016) sample determination table was used to deduce the appropriate sample of 381 while proportional sampling technique was then used to determine the actual sample per faculty as shown in table 1. The instrument used in collecting data for this study was an adapted questionnaire titled: “Culturally Responsive Leadership Questionnaire”. The Questionnaire consists of 20 items designed to elicit information on the only variable. The instrument followed a four-likert type response pattern, where VH= Very High; H=High; M=Moderate and L=Low. The questionnaire was adapted from the study of Komolafe (2025)

The instrument was validated by three lecturers in the Department of Educational Management, University of Ilorin. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method was carried out on the same set of students who are not part of the envisaged population, twice with two weeks interval. The two sets of scores obtained from the two administrations were correlated and the reliability coefficient was 0.87. The data collected were subjected to analysis using statistical package of social science. Frequency count were used to organized the responses while mean were used to answer the research questions and results were presented in tables

Data Analysis

Four research question were raised and answered using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation.

Research Questions

Research Question One: What the level of student union leaders’ involvement in critical self-reflection

Table 2. Level of student union leaders’ involvement in critical self-reflection.

S/N	Statement	N	X	S D	Decisio n
1	Involvement in fighting against student harassment.	300	3.20	0.842	Moderate
2	Involvement in dialogue with school authority of student welfare.	300	2.97	0.745	Moderate

3	Involvement in fighting for granting of fair hearing to student facing indiscipline.	300	2.86	0.910	Moderate
4	Involvement in fighting against sexual harassment.	300	2.88	0.888	Moderate
5	Involvement of fighting against victimization of student	300	2.68	0.984	Moderate
Grand Mean			2.92	0.874	Moderate

Key: low 1.00-2.50 moderate 2.51-3.50 high 3.51-4.00

Table 2 reveals the extent to which student unionism contributes to the protection of students' rights in tertiary institutions. All five items presented recorded mean scores between 2.68 and 3.20, which fall within the moderate range. The grand mean of 2.92 further confirms that student union involvement in the protection of student rights is perceived as moderate overall.

The highest mean score 3.20 was recorded for the variable Involvement in fighting against student harassment. This suggests that student unions are most visible and active in defending students against physical or emotional harassment by peers or authorities. The next most active area, with a mean score of 2.97, is Involvement in dialogue with school authority on student welfare. This reflects a moderate but meaningful effort in advocating for students' needs through negotiation or engagement with school management. Involvement in fighting against sexual harassment also recorded a moderate mean 2.88, highlighting that student unions are aware of, and partially involved in, issues related to gender-based abuse and safety within campus environments. Involvement in fighting for granting of fair hearing to students facing indiscipline scored 2.86, indicating that while student unions advocate for justice, due process may still lack sufficient representation or emphasis, the lowest mean score of 2.68 was observed in "Involvement in fighting against victimization of students." This points to an area where union representation may be weakest, suggesting a need for stronger advocacy in addressing cases where students feel unfairly targeted or treated.

These findings suggest that while student unions are playing a role in the protection of student rights, their involvement is not yet at an optimal level.

There remains a need to strengthen student union participation and effectiveness, particularly in issues of advocacy, justice, and student welfare engagement within institutional structures.

Research Question Two: What is the level of student union leaders' involvement in the formulation of culturally sensitive program?

Table 3: Level of student union leaders' involvement in the formulation of culturally sensitive program.

S/N	Statement	N	X	S D	Decision
1	Frequency of organization of orientation programs for new students.	300	3.16	0.881	Moderate
2	Effectiveness of students' union programs.	300	2.81	0.732	Moderate
3	Sensitization of students on their right as students and citizens.	300	2.71	0.904	Moderate
4	Invitation of culturally sensitive resource persons.	300	2.63	0.914	Moderate
5	Efficiency of culturally sensitive programs.	300	2.68	0.952	Moderate
	Grand Mean		2.80	0.877	Moderate

Key: low 1.00-2.50 moderate 2.51-3.50 high 3.51-4.00

Table 3 presents responses on the extent to which student union programs contribute to promoting student rights and cultural awareness in tertiary institutions. The result reveals a grand mean of 2.80, indicating a moderate level of effectiveness overall. The highest mean 3.16 was recorded for the frequency of organizing orientation programs for new students, suggesting that student unions are relatively consistent in providing introductory platforms where new students are introduced to their rights and responsibilities. The effectiveness of students' union programs followed with a mean of 2.81, showing that while the programs are functional, there is still room for improvement in planning, delivery, and follow-through. Responses on sensitization of students on their rights as both students and citizens showed a mean of 2.71, which reflects a moderate effort but points to the need for deeper and more strategic educational engagements. The invitation of culturally sensitive resource persons

recorded a mean of 2.63, the lowest among the variables. This suggests that student unions are not consistently involving voices that speak directly to diverse cultural identities within the student population. The efficiency of culturally sensitive programs scored 2.68, further indicating that while such programs exist, they may not be robust or impactful enough to leave lasting impressions on the student body.

The findings suggest that student union programs are playing a moderate role in promoting rights and cultural awareness, but there is a clear opportunity to increase their strategic impact especially in areas tied to cultural sensitivity, inclusion, and rights education.

Research Question Three: What is the level of student union leaders in inclusive engagement of students?

Table 4: Level of student union leaders’ in inclusive engagement of students.

S/N	Statement	N	X	S D	Decision
1	Level of student accessibility to the student union leaders.	300	2.79	1.011	Moderate
2	Level of access to information about the school from SUG	300	2.82	0.833	Moderate
3	Frequency of interactive engagement between SUG and the students.	300	2.74	0.885	Moderate
4	Level of the cordiality/ interpersonal relationship between the students and SUG.	300	2.61	0.949	Moderate
5	Effectiveness of the communication channel between the SUG and the students.	300	2.83	0.909	Moderate
	Grand Mean		2.76	0.917	Moderate

Key: low 1.00-2.50 moderate 2.51-3.50 high 3.51-4.00

Table 4 highlights how effectively the Student Union Government (SUG) fosters communication and ensures inclusion among students in tertiary institutions. With a grand mean of 2.76, the findings indicate that student union communication practices are perceived to be at a moderate level overall. The highest mean score 2.83 was recorded for the effectiveness of the

communication channel between the SUG and the students, suggesting that the tools and platforms for disseminating information (such as meetings, announcements, or digital media) are functioning reasonably well, though not optimally. Close behind is the level of access to information about the school from SUG with a mean of 2.82, which shows that the union is moderately effective in serving as an information bridge between the school management and the student body. The level of student accessibility to union leaders recorded a mean of 2.79, indicating that most students find it somewhat easy to approach or reach out to union leaders when necessary. Frequency of interactive engagement between SUG and the students scored 2.74, pointing to a moderate but perhaps irregular pattern of engagement. This suggests that although forums or events may exist for student interaction, they may not happen often enough or reach a wide base of students. The lowest mean 2.61 was for cordiality and interpersonal relationships between students and the union, implying that while communication exists, personal connections and rapport between students and their elected representatives may still be lacking. The student union government demonstrates a moderate capacity to promote student communication and inclusion, but there is a clear need to strengthen interpersonal rapport, increase engagement frequency, and enhance accessibility across all levels of student interaction.

Research Question Four: What is the level of student union leaders' involvement of parent/community in their activities?

Table 5: Level of student union leaders' involvement of parent/community in their activities

S/N	Statement	N	X	S D	Decision
1	Level of parent access to the students union leaders.	300	2.43	1.179	Low
2	Level of storage of students; parent data by the SUG.	300	2.24	1.088	Low

3	Functionality of the communication channel between the students and the student union leaders.	300	2.47	1.006	Low
4	Frequency of meeting between the parents and the students' union leaders.	300	2.30	1.033	Low
5	Incorporation of parents' advice into the actions of students' union leaders.	300	2.34	1.153	Low
	Grand Mean		2.36	1.092	Low

Key: low 1.00-2.50 moderate 2.51-3.50 high 3.51-4.00

Table 5 reveals the extent to which the Student Union Government SUG engages with parents in student-related matters. The grand mean of 2.36 falls within the low range, indicating a generally limited level of parental involvement or inclusion in union affairs within the sampled tertiary institutions.

Among all the items, the functionality of the communication channel between students and student union leaders recorded the highest mean score 2.47, suggesting that while communication systems exist between students and their representatives, they do not necessarily extend to involve parents. The level of parent access to student union leaders followed with a mean of 2.43, showing that opportunities for direct communication between parents and union officials are minimal. The incorporation of parents' advice into the actions of student union leaders was rated low 2.34, indicating that parental inputs are rarely considered when decisions affecting students are made. The frequency of meetings between parents and union leaders scored 2.30, reinforcing the point that formal interactions between these two groups are uncommon or not prioritised. The lowest rated variable was the level of storage of students' parent data by the SUG, with a mean of 2.24. This suggests that student unions may not maintain updated or accessible records of parent contacts, which would be critical for communication or emergency-related support.

The findings highlight a notable gap in parent-student union engagement. To bridge this gap, there is a need for the SUG to adopt more inclusive communication strategies, develop formal structures for parental consultation,

and strengthen data management systems that support stakeholder collaboration in student welfare.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study indicate that student unionism in tertiary institutions within Kwara State plays a moderate role in the protection of students' rights. As shown in Chapter Four, the highest mean score was recorded for the involvement of the student union in fighting against student harassment $\bar{X} = 3.20$, while lower means were recorded for defending students against victimisation $\bar{X} = 2.68$ and advocating for fair hearing during disciplinary procedures $\bar{X} = 2.86$. The grand mean of 2.92 suggests that while student unions are engaged in some rights-based advocacy, this engagement remains limited in depth and scope. This reflects the position of Adebayo (2023), who noted that student unions in Nigerian higher institutions tend to be reactive in their approach to student advocacy, addressing issues after they escalate rather than establishing structures for continuous protection. In a culturally diverse environment such as Kwara State, where students come from different ethnic, religious, and socio-political backgrounds, such advocacy should not only be active but also inclusive, proactive, and community-centered. However, the findings indicate that student unions have not yet developed the structural presence or cultural sensitivity needed to fully address rights-based concerns in a pluralistic student environment.

Further findings revealed that the role of student union programs in promoting students' rights and cultural awareness is also moderate. Orientation programs were rated most positively $\bar{X} = 3.16$, showing that student unions maintain consistent efforts in welcoming and guiding new students. In contrast, lower scores were recorded in areas such as the invitation of culturally sensitive resource persons $\bar{X} = 2.63$ and the overall efficiency of culturally inclusive programming $\bar{X} = 2.68$. The grand mean of 2.80 indicates that while rights-related messaging is embedded in union programs, intentional cultural inclusion remains underdeveloped. This finding supports Lee and Chen (2024), who assert that culturally responsive leadership must go beyond program delivery to embrace inclusive planning, symbolic representation, and culturally informed communication. The data from this study point to a gap between

routine programming and deeper cultural engagement, suggesting that student union leaders in Kwara State may lack the training or awareness needed to address the region's cultural plurality in a meaningful way.

Communication and inclusion practices between the student union government (SUG) and the student population were also found to be moderately effective. Respondents indicated that they had fair access to school information $\bar{X} = 2.82$ and could reach out to student leaders when needed $\bar{X} = 2.79$. However, the level of interpersonal relationship and cordiality between students and the union was among the lowest rated variables $\bar{X} = 2.61$. The grand mean of 2.76 reflects a communication model that exists but may lack warmth, continuity, and inclusiveness. See, Kokotsaki, and Thomas (2022) observed that effective student leadership in higher education is not only about providing information but also about cultivating a sense of belonging and participation among students. In the context of Kwara State, where many students may feel socially distant from institutional decision-making, the moderate rating in this area suggests that student unions have not fully embedded participatory leadership or built trust-based relationships that promote a united student front.

The findings also revealed a concerning gap in student union engagement with parents of students. All measured items including parental access to union leaders $\bar{X} = 2.43$, frequency of meetings $\bar{X} = 2.30$, and incorporation of parental advice into decision-making $\bar{X} = 2.34$ received low ratings. The grand mean of 2.36 underscores a general exclusion of parents from student governance structures. This aligns with the critique by Salihu and Lawal (2022), who argued that Nigerian tertiary institutions often perceive parents as external to institutional processes, despite their central role in students' academic and emotional wellbeing. In a culturally rooted setting like Kwara State, where family ties and communal support are deeply embedded in societal values, this disconnect reflects a missed opportunity for student unions to act as bridges between institutional authority and community support systems. Olowookere (2023) emphasized that culturally responsive leadership in Nigeria must incorporate extended stakeholder engagement including parents as part of holistic decision-making.

In summary, the findings from this study demonstrate that student unionism in Kwara State's tertiary institutions is characterized by moderate engagement,

limited cultural responsiveness, and a need for greater inclusivity. While certain strengths are evident such as the consistency of orientation programs and access to information shortcomings in culturally inclusive programming, student-union relationships, and parental involvement hinder the effectiveness of student leadership. These results affirm the argument by Wang (2023) that leadership effectiveness in student governance hinges not only on access and structure but also on how well student leaders adapt their approach to reflect the cultural and social fabric of their constituency. In this regard, strengthening student unions in Kwara State must involve deliberate efforts to train leaders in culturally responsive practices, expand stakeholder involvement, and move from reactive to proactive models of student representation.

Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that student unionism in tertiary institutions in Kwara State, while functional, remains at a moderate level in terms of its effectiveness in protecting student rights, enhancing communication, promoting cultural sensitivity, and engaging key stakeholders. Student unions were found to be more engaged in advocacy against physical or emotional harassment than in addressing systemic issues like victimization or fair hearing processes. The study also found that while student union programs include orientation and sensitization components, they often lack depth in addressing cultural inclusion. Furthermore, although students generally have access to information and union representatives, the quality of communication and inclusion remains moderate due to weak interpersonal engagement and limited dialogic interaction. Perhaps most concerning is the low involvement of parents in student union affairs, which reveals a missed opportunity for collective support, conflict mediation, and holistic student welfare.

It can be concluded that student unionism in Kwara State University holds significant potential as a platform for representation, cultural dialogue, and student empowerment, but it requires strengthening in several areas to realise this potential fully. These include building leadership capacity, embracing culturally responsive practices, institutional support for union programming, and fostering inclusive relationships that extend beyond the campus.

Recommendation

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- a. Capacity Building for Union Leaders: Tertiary institutions should implement structured leadership development programs for student union leaders, focusing on human rights advocacy, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership practices.
- b. Culturally Inclusive Programming: Student unions should collaborate with relevant university departments and cultural organisations to design and execute programmes that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population.
- c. Institutional Support and Autonomy: School authorities should provide student unions with the autonomy and resources needed to carry out student-centered initiatives. This includes logistics, access to data, and consultative roles in policy decisions affecting students.
- d. Improved Communication Strategies: Student unions should invest in creating more interactive, accessible, and transparent communication channels such as feedback platforms, town hall meetings, and anonymous suggestion systems to deepen student engagement.
- e. Parent-Union Collaboration: Institutions should encourage structured interactions between parents and student union bodies through newsletters, forums, or designated liaison officers. This will foster greater understanding and support for student affairs.
- f. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: An internal review system should be developed to monitor the performance of the SUG, track the effectiveness of programs, and identify areas of improvement in student representation and welfare.

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