THE ROLE OF THE MUSLIM STUDENTS' SOCIETY OF NIGERIA (MSSN) IN CURBING IMMORALITY AMONG STUDENTS OF BAYERO UNIVERSITY KANO

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in curbing immorality among students of Bayero University, Kano (BUK). Using a mixed-methods approach archival review, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with MSSN leaders and selected students, the study explores MSSN's historical mission, programmes (religious instruction, counselling, outreach, peer regulation), and perceived impact on students' moral behavior. Findings indicate that MSSN at BUK has sustained a visible presence through regular religious programmes, peer counselling, public campaigns, and inter-society collaborations that promote Islamic ethics and discipline. However, structural constraints (limited funding, varying student commitment, campus-wide social influences) moderate its effectiveness. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening MSSN's preventive and rehabilitative strategies and for collaborative university-society partnerships to improve moral outcomes on campuses.

Keywords*: MSSN, Bayero University Kano, Immorality, Student*

Introduction

Universities are formative environments where young adults consolidate values, form identities, and face moral choices. In Nigeria, faith-based student organizations have historically played a very significant role in providing spiritual guidance and moral formation. The Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), established in the mid-twentieth century, is among the most prominent of such organizations; it aims to consolidate Islamic identity among Muslim students, provide religious education, and promote ethical conduct.

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأۡمُرُ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِ وَٱلۡإِحۡسَٰنِ وَإِيتَآيِٕ ذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ وَيَنۡهَىٰ عَنِ ٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِ وَٱلۡمُنكَرِ وَٱلۡبَغۡيِۚ يَعِظُكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَذَكَّرُونَ

[Surah An-Naḥl: 90]

"Indeed, Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, injustice, and rebellion." (Qur'an 16:90)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"I was sent only to perfect good character."

(Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 273)

This paper investigates how MSSN at Bayero University, Kano (BUK) works to curb immorality among students, what strategies it deploys, and how students and stakeholders perceive its effectiveness.

The study addresses three research questions: what programmes and strategies does MSSN at BUK use to address immorality? How effective are these interventions from the perspectives of students and MSSN leaders? and what institutional and social factors strengthen or limit MSSN's capacity to shape moral behavior?

Background and Rationale

MSSN was founded in the 1950s to respond to the religious and moral needs of Muslim students in colonial schools, and has since become a nationwide organization with branches in universities across Nigeria. Its historical mission combines religious education with social activities aimed at shaping Muslim identity and conduct. The Qur'an reminds the faithful of their duty in social reform:

(وَلۡتَكُن مِّنكُمۡ أُمَّةٞ يَدۡعُونَ إِلَى ٱلۡخَيۡرِ وَيَأۡمُرُونَ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَيَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنِ ٱلۡمُنكَرِۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ)

[Surah Āli-ʿImrān: 104]

"Let there arise from you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; and it is they who are successful."(Qur'an 3:104)

The presence of MSSN at BUK is consistent with this national network and has included routine religious programmes, advocacy, and collaboration with university authorities.

Contemporary concerns about student immorality on Nigerian campuses—often discussed in relation to sexual behaviour, substance misuse, dress codes, and academic misconduct—motivate the inquiry into the role of student religious bodies. Empirical studies report significant levels of sexual activity and risky sexual behaviour among Nigerian tertiary students, alongside other moral and social challenges; these findings underline the need for active moral education and prevention on campuses.

Literature Review

MSSN: Origins, Mission, and National Role

Scholars such as Balogun (2019) document MSSN's evolution from a small group of devout students into a nationwide Islamic reformist movement. Its objectives include promoting Islamic education, unity, and moral discipline. The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasized brotherhood and moral support:

"Support your brother, whether he is an oppressor or oppressed." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 2443)

This Hadith inspires MSSN's approach of mutual correction and moral accountability within the student body.

Scholars have documented MSSN's evolution from a student organization in the 1950s into a broad movement with influence on religious life in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. MSSN's stated objectives emphasize the Qur'anic and Prophetic model of character, the provision of religious instruction, and the encouragement of moral conduct among Muslim students. Historical and ethnographic accounts highlight how MSSN adapted to regional variations and changing student demographics while maintaining a core focus on Islamic reform and identity formation.

Faith-Based Student Organizations and Moral Formation

The literature on religion and moral education in higher education suggests that faith organizations can affect behavior by offering:

(a) Religious instructions and normative frameworks;
(b) Supportive peer networks that model desired conducts;
(c) Counselling and pastoral care; and
(d) structured programmes that provide alternative social outlets (seminars, study groups, volunteering). Effectiveness depends on organizational capacity, credibility among students, and alignment with broader campus policies. Empirical studies indicate that student religious groups often reduce engagement in certain risk behaviours but cannot fully counteract broader social and economic drivers.
These align with Islamic teachings encouraging believers to guide one another:

(وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتُ بَعۡضُهُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءُ بَعۡضٖۚ يَأۡمُرُونَ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَيَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنِ ٱلۡمُنكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤۡتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ سَيَرۡحَمُهُمُ ٱللَّهُۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ)

[Surah At-Tawbah: 71]

"The believers, men and women, are protectors one of another; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong."(Qur'an 9:71)

Campus Immorality: Prevalence and Patterns in Nigeria

Research into Nigerian university students' reports varied prevalence of premarital sexual activity, multiple these behaviors have implications for students' health, academic success, and campus climate. Factors influencing immorality include peer pressure, urbanization, media exposure, poverty, and lack of access to consistent moral education. Interventions by student religious bodies are, therefore, part of a multi-dimensional response.

Studies highlight the prevalence of premarital sexual activity, drug use, and academic dishonesty (Yusuf, 2018). Such moral decay stems from peer pressure, social media influence, and inadequate religious instruction. The Qur'an condemns lewdness and indecency:

(وَلَا تَقۡرَبُواْ ٱلزِّنَىٰٓۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَٰحِشَةٗۖ وَسَآءَ سَبِيلٗا[Surah Al-Isrāʾ: 32])

"And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way."(Qur'an 17:32)

Therefore, religious societies like MSSN serve as moral shields for students navigating these challenges.

Conceptual Framework

The study adopts a socio-ecological framework that situates student behaviour within nested layers: individual (beliefs, knowledge), interpersonal (peer groups, MSSN networks), institutional (university policies and environment), and societal (media, culture). MSSN's interventions operate primarily at the interpersonal and institutional levels—shaping peer norms, providing education, and engaging with university authorities.

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was used these are;

i. Document and archival analysis of MSSN publications, BUK bulletins and reports;

ii. Semi-structured interviews with MSSN leaders and purposive interviews with twenty students (both MSSN members and non-members) to understand perceptions; and

iii. Participant observation of MSSN public events where feasible (e.g., Jumu'ah programs, seminars). University bulletins and MSSN chapter announcements were reviewed to map activities over the last five years. (BUK bulletins and MSSN chapter posts were consulted for corroboration.)

Sampling and Data Collection

Interviews: Ten MSSN office bearers (current and recent past) and twenty students selected to include gender balance and both active and less active students.

Documents: MSSN National History, MSSN BUK announcements and social media posts, BUK Student Affairs Bulletins.

Ethical Considerations: Verbal informed consent was obtained; anonymity and confidentiality were preserved.

Some MSSN Programmes at BUK

There are numerous programmes attached to MSSN at BUK. The following are the most popular and commonly practiced;

Religious Instruction and *Ta'lim*: Weekly tafsir sessions, halaqas, and special Ramadan programmes are routinely organized by MSSN BUK. These sessions emphasize Qur'anic morals, prophetic ethics, and discussions on contemporary moral dilemmas.

Peer Counselling and Pastoral Care: MSSN leaders provide peer counselling on personal, marital (for married students), and academic issues. The Shurah (advisory council) acts as a first-line intervention for behavioural complaints.

Public Campaigns and Seminars: MSSN organizes seminars on topics such as chastity, modesty in dress, and the dangers of substance abuse. These events frequently coincide with orientation weeks and religious calendars.

Social Activities and Alternatives: MSSN runs socially engaging events—academic competitions, debate clubs, and community service—that offer alternatives to less desirable social scenes.

Perceptions of Effectiveness

Positive Perceptions: MSSN members report that the society strengthens personal piety, increases religious knowledge, and offers a support network that deters risky behavior. Several interviewees credited MSSN with helping students avoid academic dishonesty and impure social engagements. Hence, proving as ambassadors of Islam and Bayero University Kano.

Limitations Noted: Non-members and some MSSN alumni expressed that while MSSN influences those already inclined toward religious adherence, it has limited reach among students heavily influenced by peer groups, social media, or economic pressures. Resource constraints (small budgets for outreach), turnover of student leaders, and inconsistent engagement reduce long-term continuity.

Impacts on Specific Forms of Immorality

Sexual Misconduct: While MSSN promotes chastity and awareness of sexual consequences, broader studies indicate a persistent level of risky sexual behavior among Nigerian undergraduates; MSSN's interventions are preventive for some but do not eliminate occurrences.

MSSN's emphasis on chastity influences members' attitudes. Qur'an 24:30–31 instructs believers to lower their gaze and guard their modesty.

(قُل لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ يَغُضُّواْ مِنۡ أَبۡصَٰرِهِمۡ وَيَحۡفَظُواْ فُرُوجَهُمۡۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَزۡكَىٰ لَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرُۢ بِمَا يَصۡنَعُونَ)

[Surah An-Nūr: 30]

(وَقُل لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ يَغۡضُضۡنَ مِنۡ أَبۡصَٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحۡفَظۡنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبۡدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنۡهَاۖ وَلۡيَضۡرِبۡنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّۖ وَلَا يُبۡدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوۡ ءَابَآئِهِنَّ أَوۡ ءَابَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوۡ أَبۡنَآئِهِنَّ أَوۡ أَبۡنَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوۡ إِخۡوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوۡ بَنِيٓ إِخۡوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوۡ بَنِيٓ أَخَوَٰتِهِنَّ أَوۡ نِسَآئِهِنَّ أَوۡ مَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُهُنَّ أَوِ ٱلتَّٰبِعِينَ غَيۡرِ أُوْلِي ٱلۡإِرۡبَةِ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ أَوِ ٱلطِّفۡلِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمۡ يَظۡهَرُواْ عَلَىٰ عَوۡرَٰتِ ٱلنِّسَآءِۖ وَلَا يَضۡرِبۡنَ بِأَرۡجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعۡلَمَ مَا يُخۡفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّۚ وَتُوبُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُونَ)

[Surah An-Nūr: 31]

Academic Misconduct: MSSN's emphasis on honesty and integrity has some influence on reducing examination misconduct among active members, and MSSN leaders sometimes liaise with faculty to mediate student issues. Members are often reminded that dishonesty violates the Prophet's teaching:

"He who deceives us is not one of us." (Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 102)

Indecent Dressing: Through lectures and posters, MSSN campaigns for modesty in line with Qur'an 33:59, which commands believing women to dress modestly for dignity and protection.

(يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ قُل لِّأَزۡوَٰجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَآءِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ يُدۡنِينَ عَلَيۡهِنَّ مِن جَلَٰبِيبِهِنَّۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدۡنَىٰٓ أَن يُعۡرَفۡنَ فَلَا يُؤۡذَيۡنَۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمٗا [Surah Al-Aḥzāb: 59])

Strengths of MSSN at BUK

It is argue that the positive impact of the activities of MSSN in BUK is one of the special features which make BUK popular in Nigeria and beyond

Institutional Legacy and Moral Authority: MSSN draws on a long national history and is seen as an authoritative voice on Islamic ethics among many Muslim students. Its programming—*ta'lim,* counselling, public lectures—aligns with best practices for moral education (knowledge + social support).

Peer Influence Mechanism: MSSN's peer networks provide social reinforcement for ethical norms, a mechanism known to be effective in youth behavior change.

Visibility and Collaboration: Regular interactions with faculty and student affairs offices (as documented in university bulletins) allow MSSN to influence policy discourse and participate in student welfare initiatives.

Constraints and Areas for Improvement

Limited Reach and Engagement: MSSN's most intensive influence is on self-selecting members. Reaching unaffiliated students requires varied outreach approaches sensitive to modern communication channels.

Resource and Capacity Limits: Financial and logistical limitations constrain programme scale and continuity. Leadership transition (as student leaders graduate) causes discontinuities.

Broader Social Forces: Factors such as media exposure, economic need, and urban nightlife challenge MSSN's moral messaging. Comprehensive strategies need to address structural drivers beyond religious instruction alone.

Implications; the socio-ecological framing suggests that MSSN's interpersonal and institutional efforts are necessary but not sufficient. Effective moral change on campuses requires multi-stakeholder collaboration: MSSN, university administration, counseling services, parents, and community partners.

Conclusion

The Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria at Bayero University, Kano plays a significant and positive role in promoting Islamic ethics, offering peer support, and organizing educational activities that deter immoral behaviors among participating students. However, its full potential is curtailed by constraints such as limited reach, resource shortages, and strong external social pressures. Strengthening MSSN's institutional partnerships, expanding outreach, and implementing monitoring systems can enhance its impact. Ultimately, addressing immorality on campus requires combined efforts from student organisations, university systems, families, and society at large.

Recommendations

Based on the following the paper would like to offer the following recommendation

i. **Strengthen Collaboration with University Authorities**: Formal partnership with BUK's student affairs and counselling units to co-design programmes that target at-risk populations.

ii. Expand Peer Education and Training: Train peer educators in counselling, referral procedures, and inclusive outreach to engage non-members.

iii. Use Multimedia and Digital Outreach: Adopt social media campaigns and podcasts that speak to contemporary student concerns and counter harmful narratives.

iv. Sustain Leadership through Institutional Memory: Establish handover protocols, documentation of programmes, and mentorship by alumni to reduce disruptions from leadership turnover.

v. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement simple M&E frameworks to track attendance, behavioural indicators, and referrals—build an evidence base for programme effectiveness.

vi. Holistic Approach: Coordinate with health services and academic departments to address sexual health, mental health, and socioeconomic drivers of immoral behavior.

Limitations of the Study

This study relied on purposive sampling and qualitative interviews at a single university chapter, limiting generalizability. Quantitative prevalence estimates of immoral behaviors were not generated from primary survey work in this study; rather, the paper references existing empirical studies on student sexual behavior and related issues. Future research could include a campus-wide survey and longitudinal follow-up.

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