

Christian Education in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria: The Babcock University Example

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ABSTRACT—Recent negative developments in Nigerian public education call for concern. Issues such as cultism, examination malpractices, and strikes require urgent attention. This study investigated a faith based alternative by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Remo, Ogun state in southwestern Nigeria. Christian education as practiced by the SDA church is based on what they refer to as holistic education in which the spiritual, social, and physical dimensions of training are added to the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. The role of SDA education is spelt out and their teachings on Creationism, Vegetarianism, Physical fitness and work/study which are implemented particularly at the higher levels of education. These features, some of which had also been espoused by 19th century educational reformers like Johann Pestalozzi and Horace Mann form the bedrock of Christian education of the Adventist hue. Some of these components of education are particularly useful in resolving the contradictions in Nigerian public education and useful to students in later life.

Keywords: Christian education, Nigeria, Adventist, holistic education

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I. Introduction

A notable educationist in Nigeria, C.O. Taiwo, has noted that there are inherent problems associated with the running of public education in Nigeria. He advocates that the education that truly 'educates' is one in which character building is the aim of all educational efforts (Taiwo, 1986, p.6). Taiwo's comments are against the backdrop of examination malpractices, the erosion of good societal values prevalent in the public school system in Nigeria. In spite of the good new technologies have brought, some of them especially the internet and cellular phones have been used to commit fraud and other crimes. The prevailing worldview in 19th century America among Christians centered on eschatological beliefs, especially the imminence of Christ's second coming. The prevailing 'worldly' attitude in the general American society of the 1850s led many Christian groups to establish their own schools. They wanted to escape "vulgar language, quarrels and bickering" that they perceived as prevalent in public education at the time (Schwarz, 1979, p.120). Schwarz's assertions are supported by Sandsmark who posits that religious schools teaching religious values help children to form a positive identity and lead to good and autonomous lives. (Sandsmark, 30). Ellen White notes that the basic challenge of Christian religious education is that of evangelism, leading the students to Christ. (White, 1900, pp.300-301). McAllister sees the challenge for religious education in a different hue. He talks of a post-modern or millennial generation of students who have been brought up to use technology as a way of life. Cellular phones, computers, mp3 players, instant messaging and the internet are taken as a matter of course. (McAllister, 1999, pp.7,8). As a result of their 'marriage' to new technologies, he lists some of the characteristics of this new generation as poor verbal skills, immersion in the world of technology, apathy for other people's opinion and lack of trust for the older generation, be they teachers or parents (McAllister). He posits that Christian religious education stands in a unique place to lead the postmodern generation to a vibrant Christian experience in spite of the latter's 'marriage' to technology. Kimball describes this generation as the first to grow up in a post-modern, post-Christian culture whose spirituality has been acquired from pop-culture icons, non-Christian parents, liberal media and public school teachers who possess little or no faith (SDAC, 2004, p.12). The terms Christian religious education and religious education are used by the two preceding scholars synonymously.

The works of McAllister and others however fail to address issues facing youth emerging from the developing world. Post-modern apathy seems to be a phenomenon of the West for now as countries such as Nigeria grapples with poverty, subsistent living, lack of basic infrastructure in schools arising from poor funding of education, erosion of societal values, the attendant issue of cultism in schools as well as examination malpractices. Our study is based within the socio-economic milieu of a developing country grappling with developmental issues and would be helpful to countries grappling with the same developmental issues as Nigeria. The study is located in Remo, one of the four divisions of Ogun state in southwestern Nigeria.

II. The Role of SDA Schools, Colleges and Universities

The Adventist church recognizes three agencies of education, namely, the Home, the Church and SDA schools, colleges and universities.(West-Central Africa Division, p.176) . SDAs assert that the home is society's basic educational agency. Parents as the first and most influential teachers have the responsibility to inculcate Godly values in their wards. It is believed that the familial setting shapes the values, attitudes and worldview of the young. Therefore, parents are to use the opportunity of the home to train their children to fear God. Family members are polite and courteous Christians, thus exerting a far-reaching influence for good. SDAs believe that education was based on the familial setting during the time of the bible patriarchs. In the family, with parents as instructors, the child is to learn lessons of respect, obedience, reverence and self-control. Parents are not expected to permit business cares, worldly customs and maxims and fashion to occupy them at the expense of their children's training. The SDA approach is particularly relevant in a postmodern world where religious values are held in abeyance.

The local church as an agent of education also has a major role to play in the educational enterprise. The church provides an atmosphere of acceptance and love which develops a personal faith in Jesus Christ and a growing understanding of the Word of God. This understanding includes both an intellectual aspect and a life in harmony with God's will. It is the home school that prepares boys and girls to attend the church school. Diligent, faithful instruction in the home is the best preparation that children can receive for school life.

The church school in the SDA setting is principally the Sabbath School. This is divided into both Adult and Junior divisions. The junior division is further divided into Cradle Roll (Ages 0–5), Kindergarten (Ages 6–12), and Earliteens (Ages 12–15). Apart from bible studies suitable for the various age groups, arts and crafts, science, nature study and music are taught, using visual aids where appropriate. This is in tandem with the Montessori approach which encourages children to learn through exploration and sensory experience.

All levels of SDA schooling as the third agent build on the foundation of the first two, namely the home and the church. In the school, the Christian teacher is to function in the classroom as God's minister in the plan of salvation regardless of the subject he teaches. He is to model the Christian graces by living a morally upright life. Issues like sexual harassment and examination malpractices on the part of the teacher are not expected to come into play. For instance, pre-marital and extra-marital sex is sanctioned at Babcock University (owned and operated by the SDAs) for both staff and students. Students caught cheating in examinations are rusticated for one year as first offenders and are dismissed at a repeat infraction. The formal and the informal curricula help students to reach their potential for spiritual, mental, physical, social and vocational development.

There are eight key components of the SDA school system worthy of note. First, there is the student. He is seen from the Christian perspective as a child of God. The Christian educator is able to understand the conflict taking place within each person and realizing the need to restore the image of God in the student and sets about doing the task using Christian methodologies. The student is therefore the primary focus of the entire educational effort and should be loved, accepted, and encouraged to reach his full potential. On his part, he (the student) is expected to obey the school's code of conduct in dressing and deportment, attend lectures regularly and participate in the spiritual exercises of his institution. Student outcomes constitute a major guiding criterion in assessing the health and effectiveness of the school. Secondly, the teacher holds a pride of place within SDA educational effort. Ideally, the teacher should be both a committed Adventist Christian and an exemplary role model of the Christian graces and professional competencies. (West-Central African Division, p.177). The teacher's task is very challenging and demanding while at the same time rewarding. It is a special work that takes wholehearted commitment for success to be achieved. The ecclesiastical approach

sees the role of the teacher as that of a spiritual leader as well as an intellectual disciplinarian.

Thirdly, the knowledge being taught is grounded in faith in a certain set of presuppositions or worldview. SDA cosmology recognizes both a supernatural as well as a natural order. There is an underlying acceptance of the metaphysical aspect of the cosmos by them (Omeonu et. al., 2002) True knowledge, to SDAs, is therefore, more than intellectual or scientific knowledge. It encompasses cognitive, experiential, emotional, relational, intuitive and spiritual dimensions. This position is in line with the thinking of educators like Pestalozzi, Steiner, Montessori and Dewey. The fourth component is the curriculum. This includes the courses offered for study by an educational institution. The curriculum cannot be an adaptation of the secular curriculum but one that is grounded on a Christian set of presuppositions as noted above. It is to promote academic excellence and should include a core of general studies needed for responsible citizenship in a given culture along with spiritual insights that inform Christian living and build community. A balanced, integrated curriculum addresses major developmental needs in the intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, emotional and vocational dimensions. All areas of study are examined from the perspective of the biblical worldview. Apart from intellectual and spiritual instructions, vocational courses in agriculture, mechanics, wood-working, home economics, baking, typing, computer appreciation and similar subjects are taught in SDA schools, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels.

The fifth component is the instructional program. The instruction given in the classroom emphasizes true knowledge that intentionally integrates faith and learning. The rigors of scientific inquiry are taught side by side with the bible. Thus, the theory of evolution is juxtaposed with the biblical account of creation in SDA classrooms. Prayers are said at the beginning of each lecture regardless of the discipline. The instructional methodology actively engages the needs and ability of each student, giving opportunity to put what is learned into practice.

Discipline is also emphasized as a component of SDA education. This term is not synonymous with punishment, rather, it is the development of self-control in the student. Although the student is asked to subscribe to a code of conduct on entry into an SDA school, his will and intelligence are engaged with the aim of restoring him in the image of God. At Babcock University, the Chaplaincy department

works hand in hand with the Guidance and Counseling Unit in addressing student concerns. The Disciplinary Committee is only brought in when there is a serious infraction of the rules and regulations of the school. Closely allied to this component of education is the school life. A blended emphasis of worship, study, labor, recreation and relationships are emphasized. The campus community is pervaded by joyful spirituality, a spirit of cooperation, and respect for the diversity of individuals and cultures. Students are taught how to dress and comport themselves in academic and social situations. Dresses for lectures and social events are prescribed and etiquette is taught in order to maintain dignity and decorum and develop the students into ladies and gentlemen.

Finally, assessment is a key component for the school that subscribes to the SDA philosophy of education. Such evidence is found in the curriculum, teaching and learning activities, the testimonials of students, graduates, employees and community at large. The SDAs have the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) which is a worldwide academic auditing body that assesses SDA tertiary institutions on a yearly basis. Feedback is also encouraged from employers of labor who engage graduates of Adventist educational institutions. Babcock University has a Quality Assurance department that assesses from time to time the processes and products of all facets of university life. The schools also subscribe to accrediting bodies within their locality.

III. Spiritual Education

The SDA approach to education is based on the Bible, the word of God. It is a distinctive and unique approach to reality, truth and value. Much of SDA educational thought is derived from Ellen G. White. She was born near Gorham, Maine, USA on November 26, 1827 to Robert and Eunice Harmon with a twin sister, Elizabeth. An accident at age 9 ended her formal education while she was still in elementary school (Omeonu, 2002, pp.160-161). She was part of the Millerite movement, a group that was expecting the second coming of Christ in 1844 in North America. After the Great Disappointment, she and a few others began in-depth bible studies. She received her first vision at age 17 and thereafter became a leader and spiritual advisor to the SDA church (Omeonu). Ellen White was one of the co-founders of the SDA church at Battle Creek, Michigan, USA in 1860 . As an

author, she wrote 25 million words out of which 100 books have been published. She is recorded as the most translated woman in history and the most translated American writer of either sex. (Babalola 2002, 120). With regards to true education, she has this to say:

Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need for a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the perusal of a certain course of study.... It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and spiritual powers (White, p.13).

It is therefore not surprising that the SDA emphasizes the teachings of the Bible and the inculcation of spiritual and ethical values in all of her educational institutions. At Babcock University, its flagship institution in Remo, there is compulsory residence hall and chapel worship irrespective of religious affiliation. In addition to this, students of other denominations or religious persuasion are still allowed at fixed times (like Sunday) to go and worship in their own peculiar manner without let or hindrance (Oyinloye, 2006). In our questionnaire deployment only 28% of respondents agree that compulsory hall and chapel worship is right. All students irrespective of discipline are required to register for and take the course, Life and Teachings of Christ. This is to enable them to get acquainted with the teachings and person of Christ. Faculty (lecturers) and staff and students are expected to model Christian decorum in behavior, dressing and conversation. A dress code is strictly implemented and students stand to be penalized when in breach of this. The Chaplaincy unit, Guidance and Counseling department and the office of the University pastor and the Hall Deans mentor the students and have personal relationships with them with a view to inculcating moral and spiritual values in them (Olaore, 2007). Prayers are offered at the beginning of each lecture. Creationism is taught side by side with the evolution theory. The idea that humans were created in the image of God (though fallen) is expected to make the students to value themselves and work toward God's ideal for their lives.

The Adventist Youth Society (AYS) and the Nigeria Association of Adventist Students (NAAS) play some role in the spiritual tone of the university. The AYS was founded in the United States in the late 1890s by Luther Warren and Harry Fenner. They were SDA youth who felt the need to establish a youth organization that was called the Missionary Volunteers (MV). The name was changed to AYS almost

a century later to reflect its expanded role and activities. The MV was set up to take care of the youth and engender spiritual fellowship and interest among them. (Ola, 2007) The society whose aim is to “preach the advent message to all the world in this generation” became part of the department of Youth and Education of the world church and today has affiliates at all local SDA churches on the globe. It is divided into pathfinders (youth below age 16) and senior youth (from age 16 and above). Youth activities and program as well as progressive classes (where Bible doctrines, arts and crafts, volunteer work, endurance tests and aerobic skills are taught) are held weekly on Babcock university campus as it happens elsewhere. Friday evenings are for social and spiritual program while Sabbath (Saturday) afternoons are for the progressive classes. Senior youth are taught social and leadership skills in addition to bible doctrines and denominational history. What makes the difference at Babcock is that non-SDAs have the opportunity to join the organization and some do participate in the programs.

The Nigeria Association of Adventist Students (NAAS) was born in 1982 at the Youth Camp held at St. Andrews College, Oyo. The camp was put together and directed by Pastor J.A. Ola, then youth director, for the old West Nigeria Mission. Youth in public tertiary institutions at the time did not feel comfortable joining the AYS with its compulsory uniforms (akin to that of the Boys Scouts and Girls Guides) as they believed this would be incompatible with their campus life. NAAS was a compromise arrangement to reach this cadre of Adventist youth and cater for their needs on campus. It was and still is to foster and conduct Sabbath worship on campuses with Adventist students. Other duties include conducting public evangelism, catering for the social needs of SDA singles and conducting an annual convention to bring all SDA students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria together (Ola, 2007). As at December, 2004, the association is under the chaplaincy unit of the Youth and Education department of the Nigeria Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists with headquarters at Maryland, Lagos.

The task of NAAS at Babcock University is made onerous because of the preponderance of non-SDA students over Adventists; (see figure below)

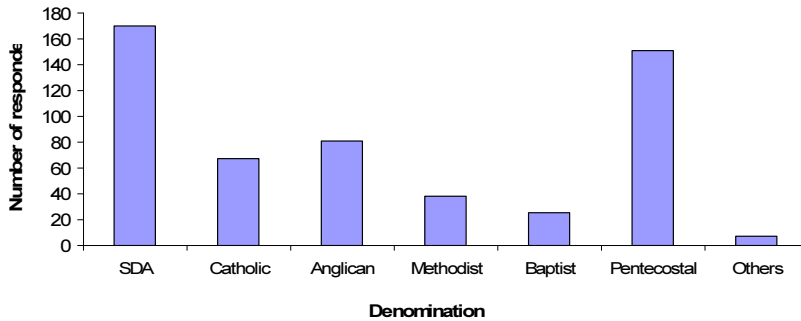


Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by denomination

The above represent a purposive administration of questionnaire distributed among students of the Schools of Education and Humanities, Management Sciences and Science and Technology at Babcock University.

The task of evangelizing non-SDA students is made much more onerous, especially among those students that have a tendency towards deviant and anti-social behavior (Oyinloye, 2006). NAAS, the association of Adventist students' effort at proselytizing has met with little success. The paradox of being a minority in their own university is not lost on them.

IV. Vegetarianism and Physical Fitness

SDAs believe that the original diet given to man by God in the garden of Eden was a meatless diet consisting of nuts, grains, fruits and vegetables (Gen.1:29 -30) It was not until the great flood that God permitted meat (Gen.9:3,4). It seems that with the introduction of meat, the ages of the patriarchs began to diminish until the time of the psalmist when he asserted that the average age of man is 70 (Ps. 90:10) (Obisesan, 2006).

SDAs have done extensive studies on health, especially through the School of Public Health, Loma Linda University, California. Loma Linda is an Adventist university. It is believed that extensive use of meat may cause excessive production of cholesterol that can clog the blood vessels and increase the likelihood of coronary heart disease and high blood pressure as blood would not flow freely in the capillaries. Certain cancers may also result from meat eating apart

from zoonoses, diseases passed directly from animals to human beings. Adventists believe in promoting a healthful lifestyle in order to be fit to serve God and fellow humans and to prevent disease as much as possible. Animal protein is replaced with that of plant in vegetarian servings, by using tofu (soy protein) in stews and other preparations. The diet is supplemented with fruits, grains, nuts and vegetables. Vegetarian diet is the only food served in SDA school cafeteria and all students are expected to eat this. The type of vegetarianism practiced is the lacto-ovo-vegetarianism which includes only milk and dairy products as sources of food originating from animals. The protein in the milk complements and enriches vegetable proteins, so that all the essential amino acids needed by the body are acquired.

Further to the above, compulsory physical exercises are engaged in by all students on daily and weekly basis through a compulsory physical exercise course and other programs. Babcock University as at 2004 had commenced the building of a mini stadium to accommodate its almost 4000 students. This is in addition to tennis and basketball courts and a football field that have been in existence when Babcock University was known as the Adventist Seminary of West Africa. The idea of physical exercise to enhance good health and longevity is not new. Studies have shown that the Hunzas who live in the northern part of Pakistan live long. They live surrounded by some of the highest and most massive mountains on earth, the Hindu Kush and the Karakorum. The area is crossed by rivers, tributaries and the Indus river. The sides of the mountains are terraced by the Hunzas who grow and subsist on grains and fruits, especially apricots. Their longevity and excellent health of the inhabitants have been traced to their vegetarian diet, austere lifestyle and much physical exercise as a result of their mountainous environment (Pamplona-Roger, 1998, p. 101)

Sundays are set apart for Adventist students to engage in manual labor for the university community free of charge. SDA students receive an annual bursary of N80000 called the Heritage Award, and the community service is a kind of payback or appreciation for the kind gesture of the church and the university (Adighibe, 2006). In addition to serving as an outlet for physical exercise. The manual labor is expected to inculcate the spirit of discipline, dignity of labor and diligence. 46.5% of our questionnaire respondents agree that compulsory physical exercise is beneficial.

V. Work/Study Program

SDA school administrators are mandated by policy to create job openings for students who are willing to work to earn their way through school. This opportunity is open to all registered students irrespective of denominational or religious affiliation. This practice is more prominent in SDA tertiary institutions which have industries in addition to traditional working places on campus. Such places include library, cybercafé, computer laboratory, farm, cafeteria, maintenance department, janitorial and science laboratories. Students are also paid as teachers for vocational training in baking, sewing, carpentry and other programs (Adighibe). Students who willingly register for vocational training are given the training free of charge while their tutors are paid as indicated.

When Babcock University ran as the Adventist Seminary of West Africa, hours worked per week depended on the academic load (number of courses registered for) by students and their academic performance. Dr. Stuart Berkley, ACWA president during the Nigerian civil war says inter alia:

For years the College supplied wheat, corn, fruit-malt Bread, peanut butter, vegetables and eggs to supermarkets in Ibadan and Lagos. This industry gave work to between 20 and 30 students and a profit to the College of about 3000 pounds (Africa-Indian Ocean Division, p.12).

Things are somewhat different in the Babcock era. All students register for 20 academic credits per semester. They are also expected to do 20 hours of work in their offices or in the industries employed. Each student determines his or her area of interest and where he or she would like to work. Joy Adighibe, Work-Study/SIWES Coordinator says that a study her office conducted showed that 90% work/study students performed excellently well in their academic studies (Adighibe).

As at 2004, each student earned N25 cents per hour. The said helps in subsidizing the student's fees or in meeting out of hand expenses while in school. Moves are on to increase the amount to give the students a higher level of pay. This opportunity has been a lifeline to indigent students to get by.

For nearly a century, Adventist educators have emphasized the values of work/study programs and have expended major resources

and efforts in developing them on all campuses. Opportunities for the practice of certain vocational skills is part of the educative process. Through this means, many students are able to defray a large share of their educational expenses in activities that may continue to be a source of earning power in later life.

Thus apart from earning money for immediate use, students may acquire skills for life and become employable graduates on leaving Adventist schools. This paints a different scenario from a World Bank report which talks of the preponderance of unemployable graduates without skills in much of Africa. Thus, graduates of the work/study program can create employment for themselves after graduation and even become employers of labor using the skills they learned while in school. Also, SDAs believe that a part of each working day should be set apart for mental improvement while the other portion should be for manual labor involving agricultural work or the mechanical arts. This type of training is expected to inculcate habits of self-reliance and firmness and it is expected to produce a character that does not yield to evil influences. This approach is in tandem with Pestalozzi's idea of including vocational education in his holistic theory and practice.

We were able to ascertain that 269 students were employed as at 1993 out of 485 registered students. We are unable to get statistics for the Babcock era, although we received time sheets and other documents to verify the employment of students in the university. The lack of central statistics is a weakness that we observed. However, we observed that employment cut across industries like the farm, bakery, water factory, library, laboratories, departments and offices. Efforts are being made to computerize the documentation in order to preserve records for university use and for future researchers.

VI. Conclusion

The whole gamut of Christian education as practiced by the SDA church in Remo, Ogun state in southwestern Nigeria can be said to involve the training of the heart, the head, and the hands. Students imbibe biblical ethical standards that govern their behavior in and out of campus. This is likely to spill over to their post -graduation and provide the nation with the much needed crop of workers with integrity and honesty. Graduates that fear God and shun evil and appreciate the dignity of labor provide a salubrious effect on Nigeria

and beyond. The promotion of healthful living through the serving of vegetarian food and the physical fitness program as well as the vocational and community service aspects augur well for the practitioners and the general public. Students of Babcock University going out into the larger society can promote the same values. Students learn the virtue of self-reliance and hard work. The work/study program provides an avenue to cash-strapped students to earn a good part of their school fees and upkeep and appreciate the dignity of labor. This is quite unlike their counterparts in some other institutions of learning where work/study is not available and the dignity of physical labor is not appreciated. The skills learnt by such students may give them the advantage of starting their own businesses later in life and thus become employers of labor instead of roaming the streets in search of non-existent job openings. Moreover, being busy with academic work and work/study leaves little or no idle time for students to get up to mischief.

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APPENDIX: SECTION A: Respondent's Personal Data

Please underline your preference or mark (✓) as applicable in each section.

1. 1 – 70 (d) 70 and above
2. Sex (a) Male (b) Female
3. Occupation (a) Student (b) Lecturer (c) administrator
4. Marital Status (a) Married (b) Single (c) Divorced (d) Widowed
5. Religion (a) Christianity (b) Islam (c) Others
6. If Christian, state denomination (a) Seventh-day Adventist (b) Catholic (c) Anglican (d) Methodist (e) Baptist (f) Pentecostal (g) Other

SECTION B: Research Questionnaire

PART 1: Positive Implication

Adventist education promotes

1. The equipment of graduates intellectually, pragmatically, and spiritually.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
2. A good ethical foundation for nation-building for its products.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
3. Good health through its compulsory physical fitness programme and the serving of vegetarian food in schools.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
4. An avenue for witnessing about Jesus Christ to the world.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
5. Uninterrupted academic cycle occasioned by absence of cult groups and strikes.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
6. The integration of faith and learning thus filling a gap in public education

- Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
7. A vehicle to address the post modern indifference to religious issues.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
8. A viable alternative to public education.
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
9. Training for Christian religious leaders
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []

PART 2: Negative Implication

Adventist education encourages

10. An expensive system when compared with the public school system
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
11. Parochialism based on the policies and practices of its owners
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
12. Heavy financial burden for parents
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
13. The teaching of Creationism as opposed to the theory of evolution
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []

SECTION C: General Questions (Additional for students only)

14. Serving vegetarian diet in the cafeteria without option of meat
actually promotes good health
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
15. Compulsory chapel and Sabbath services attendance is good
Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []

16. There is too much emphasis on conservative dressing on campus
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
17. Work/Study programmes to earn extra money for fees are only open to Adventists.
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
18. Teachers do their best to be good role models to the students
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
19. I feel good about compulsory physical fitness programme.
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
20. I am satisfied with the activities of BUSA, the students' association because the authorities don't interfere with its programmes
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
21. Deviant and anti-social behaviour is rare here at Babcock University
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
22. The academic cycle is unbroken because of lack of strikes by staff
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
23. I feel good when prayers are made before a lecture
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
24. I believe that in addition to my academic qualification, the training here will also make me a morally sound individual useful to society
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
25. If I had the opportunity, I will change my school
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []
26. Overall, I am quite satisfied with my stay here.
 Agree [] Disagree [] Undecided []