

Students' and Pupils' Views towards the Causes of Students Protest in Higher Institutions of Learning: A Case of Copperbelt University in Kitwe District.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the views of students and pupils towards the causes of student's protests at Copperbelt University. A case study design was employed. 60 students and 30 grade 12 pupils participated in this study. The study revealed that students view protest as being driven by the desire to be heard and have their demands met by government and the management. Further, students believe the protest are caused by reluctance on part of those that are responsible to look into their plight for example, on matters that affect them during their academic life. The study has revealed that pupils think students know their rights and entitlements hence, if their rights are not met, they result to protests. Pupils and students have a general understanding of their rights, freedoms and obligations. It is this knowledge that motivates or influences their participation in protests. This study showed that the possession of civic knowledge seems to motivate rather than constrain the need to take part in student protests. For these students being aware of what is entitled to them and being denied that is a sufficient

reason to protest especially if the entity that mandated to provide that is failing. From this, it is clear that Zambia students like elsewhere, mount informed protest aimed at a particular issue, for a specific aim and directed to specific audience-often the government. Students and pupils suggested that the solution to student protest lies in timely disbursement of student's meal and book allowances which they strongly feel they are entitled to. Government must engage in various income generating activities. The police officers also should not use excessive force to address protests. The study shows that generally speaking the students, pupils have significant civic knowledge and understanding and often, they emphasize the need to protect what they see as their rights. The study, therefore argues that when citizens have an understanding of their civil rights, a denial of those rights has potential to result in protests. From this perspective, the causes of protests at Zambian university should not be interpreted as resulting from a lack of civic education but due to its possession. 1

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study and the definitions of some terms used in the chapter.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

“Authorities in Zambia on Wednesday closed the country's top two public universities after students went on the rampage protesting at non-payment of food and book allowances. University of Zambia students burnt tyres and used logs to barricade the main road leading from the airport into the capital city Lusaka in protests that started late on Tuesday, according to police. Their peers at the Copperbelt University in the central city of Kitwe also staged violent protests, prompting the authorities to send students home. Police said they had arrested than two dozen protesters for riotous behaviour.” (News24 report in 2016)

Over the years and even before the 1995 student protests and closures have become synonymous with universities education in Zambia. In 2015, just as the students at University of Witwatersrand were protesting against fee increments, in the famous ‘fees must fall’ campaign, Copperbelt university

students were brutally beaten by state policy for protesting for their book allowances.

Unfortunately, these protests have lasting impacts on students who fail to complete their studies within stipulated time. Also, for those who get expelled as a result of the protests their lives are ruined.

Theoretically, Maposa and Mlambo’s (2015) conceptualisation of student protests as an expression of academic freedom, and the inviolability of human rights. From this point of view, academic freedom implies the ability to engage in the exploration or articulation of any topic or subscribe to any belief system without being held up. Under 2 pining this freedom, is the idea that human rights as universally acclaimed as they are, cannot be swept under the carpet. Human rights exist for every one’s protection against people who might want to dehumanize other people. Accordingly, human rights exist to help people get along with each other peacefully in society or within an institution. Thus, when human rights are violated the victims, in this case students feel obliged to defend their rights hence the protests.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students protests have been recorded across different parts of higher institutions of learning in Africa and outside Africa indicating different reason accounting for students protests (Maposa and Mlambo 2015; Nyamnjio 2015). Despite students’ protests

being recorded at higher institutions of learning in Zambia, little empirical evidence exists to indicate the views of students and pupils towards the causes of students protests at Copperbelt University. It was imperative therefore that the study of this nature is conducted.

1.3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to establish the Students 'and pupils' views towards the causes of students protests in Higher institutions of learning in Kitwe district.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine the views of students towards the causes of Students protest at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district.
2. To establish the views of pupils towards the causes of students protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district.
3. To examine the students and pupils' views on the role of civic education in promoting the students protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district
4. To establish the measures that can be used to address students' protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe District

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions;

1. What are the views of students towards the causes of Students protest at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district?
2. What are the views of pupils towards the causes of students protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district?
3. What are the students and pupils' views on the role of civic education in promoting the students protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district?
4. What are the measures that can be used to address students' protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe District?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It was hoped that the study would generate information on views of students and pupils towards the causes of students' protests in higher learning institutions. The study further hoped to identify some of the ways in which these problems could be resolved. It was also hoped that this study might contribute to existing knowledge on student protests and how that could be used for promoting peaceful social changes and organized claim making by citizens without recourse to violence.

1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to Copperbelt University and Chifubu Secondary school. This is because Copperbelt university is one of the universities where students protest has been recorded. Chifubu Secondary was chosen because grade twelve at this school are

also among the students who go to Copperbelt university to become students. The school was also chosen so as to triangulate the respondents so as to enhance validity of the findings of the study.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study should be generalized to other higher institutions of learning with caution as a researcher adopted case study design that limits generalisation.⁴

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- **Student:** refers to university students that took part in the study
- **Pupil:** refers to all grade twelve pupils in the study
- **Civic knowledge:** refers to an understanding or possession of knowledge about citizens' rights, freedoms, obligations and responsibility as citizens.
- **protests:** refers to revolts mounted by students as they push their claims against government.

Presentation of Findings

The views of students towards the causes of Students protest at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district

Majority of the university students that participated in this study explained that students protest because they are not given what is entitled to them. One university student explained that

the problem is that the government knows that they are supposed to give us book and meal

allowances. But the problem is that they always delay in doing this. Sometimes, students will go in to the following year without receiving their full allowances. The problem is that students spend most of their time looking for money for food instead of studying. This is very disturbing.

Another student added that

whenever we present these problems to the school authorities, they always tell us that there is nothing they can do except to wait for the government. But when they say that, we ask ourselves, where is the government? Where can we find them? When we realize that the government is Lusaka and we cannot get to them, the only option 'Kuchivivula' i.e. to protest. When we do that, then you will the minister coming to address us and then they pay.

Other students were of the view that the only way that students can effectively communicate is when they protest because they cannot be heard. In reference to the recent cholera outbreak which led to several deaths and the closure of schools one student said,

It took the death of some people for the government to realize what we have always been talking about. Students have from time immemorial complained about the unhealthy conditions that we live in at universities. Our

toilets and bathrooms are very bad. The toilets are broken and sometimes we don't get water. But when you look at the population of this university how can that be. How do you expect that there can be no outbreak of diseases like cholera? In my view, the government is to blame because they do not pay attention when students talk.

Another student argued,

If the government and university authorities can just spend some time to listen to us, all these protests could be avoided. The problem is that when we talk nobody listens. When we protest, they say it is the politicians who are influencing us. They send police to beat us up and arresting us. Treating us like criminals instead of listening to our complaints. This is unlike other countries for example in South Africa. There students are respected and their voices heard. In the last protests, the president responded but, in our case, it was the police.

A large number of students explained that they rarely intend that the protests should be turn violent. As one put it “we always plan for a peaceful protest. I have been at this school for four years and each year, I have participated in the protests. We walk peacefully but the problem is always with the police officers. Instead of giving us security during the protests, often they throw tear gas on us. Then they start beating us and we start

running. Some students get annoyed and they start destroying things. Then it ends up in a disaster. I want to argue that intellectuals from a university cannot protest and become violent”.

Besides the issues related to food and meal allowances, students also explained that they protested when there is a dispute between government and the lecturers. Further, one student said the following:

Last time lecturers went on a go slow because their salaries were delayed. But at other universities the lecturers withheld student results because the lecturers were not paid their allowances. Now the students were the ones suffering. So, it was justified that they protest because the government kept warning the lecturers to report for work. We knew that this problem will take a lot of time. We had to come in to help the lecturers so that they could get their benefits and we also get our results, hence the protests. If students are given all they are entitled to, I don't think they can protest.

Generally, it appears that students view student's protests as being caused by failure by government to meet students and the University needs on time.

Who is to blame for student protests?

[1] Government	[2] 70%
[3] Students	[4] 30%
[5] Other	[6] 0

4.2 The views of pupils towards the causes of student's protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district

Regarding the views of grade twelve pupils towards the causes of students protest at Copperbelt University, expressed different views about what causes students protest at Copperbelt University. For example one of the pupils said the following:

If one of my rights have been denied, then I have a right to defend my rights. It matters not that it is the government that has denied me the rights. This is why you see students are the ones who are always protesting. The question is that why do educated people behave in this manner? What people don't realize is that students understand their rights and when they protest, they are just trying to force government to respect their rights. If you give students what they want, they will never make any noise trust me.

It was noted that from the submissions from both pupils that they were prepared to do

anything legally possible to protest when their rights were denied. This impetus to claim what they think is right starts as they gain more and more knowledge of their rights and freedoms

This finding might explain why new students to university are prepared to participate in protest when they are at university. Under normal circumstances, one would expect that new students would be reluctant to take part in protest. The pupils further believe that students protest to defend their right or entitlements

4.3 The students and pupils' views on the role of civic education in promoting the students protests at Copperbelt University in Kitwe district

Table 2. Views of pupils. Civic education contributes to students protests.

[7] No	[8] 10%
[9] Yes	[10] 80%
[11] Other	[12] 0

Most pupils felt that students protest because they know their rights and not because of a lack of it. As one pupil explained:

students at university know their rights. I think they are prepared to defend their rights. You see, if the government or even my parents know that they have a responsibility to provide my needs, and they don't what do

you expect me to do. The causes of these protests are always known but when people don't want to take responsibility, they have to be forced and the protest is one way of doing that.

The findings of the study also showed that possession of civic knowledge contribute to student protests. The table below shows the views of students regarding the contribution of civic knowledge to students protest

Table 3. Views of students

[13] Civic knowledge contribute causes protests	[14] Yes	[15] 60
[16] Civic knowledge does not cause protests	[17] No	[18] 40

Among those who felt that the possession of civic knowledge causes protests were boys. According to them, the more people knew about their rights, the more prepared they were to defend them including protesting. The majority of the group that argued that the possession of civic knowledge would cause protests were female who argued that the lack of knowledge is what caused people to engage in violent behavior and conduct. However, during the focus group, after serious debates and arguments, a large number of participants agreed that people protest when their rights are denied. In this way, student protests were

understood as being a result of rights being denied.

During the focus group discussions, one participant narrated how his brother could not go into university because it was closed the entire year due to student protest. The unfortunate outcome was that when schools were reopened, the government addressed all the student concerns that led to the protest, but his brother was expelled. This story led to a serious debate on how unfair the government had been on this poor student who had become a local trader at the market. The participant, argued that student protests can be avoided, but when they occur, leniency must be practiced because the students are the future of the country.

One of the students said:

Civic knowledge contributes to students' protest we protest because our rights are violated like we have right to education.

We apply protests as one way of resolving conflicts especially between university management and government. In addition, we protest to put pressure on Government by bring out all evil hills for the betterment of the community. It appears that civic education provides students and pupils with the knowledge that makes them to demand for their rights. Hence civic knowledge that is obtained through civic education makes them to resort to protest as a way of showing their displeasure. Most students interviewed

explained that if government provides them book and meal allowances, they would have no reason to participate or even organise protests in the first place. One student explained that what students are asking for in these protests is simply a right to live. As it turns out however, the knowledge of their rights and freedoms, and their determination to defend and protect them, is what drives their participation in protests. All students and pupils in this study strongly believed that students were entitled to book and meal allowances. One student argued, it was also quite clear throughout the interviews that students and pupils understood their freedoms, rights and obligations; how to defend these rights and; how to conduct themselves in light of their responsibilities due to civic knowledge that these students receive.

4.4 measures to address students protests that are so prevalent in at Copperbelt university

All students and pupils that took part in this study believed that the solution to the student protest was simply providing students the necessary conditions to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills. They were unanimous about government's failure to provide students' needs on time. The solution therefore was that the government needed to come with a sustainable way of

raising money to support university education. Some suggested that investing in the national pension schemes could be one way that governments can raise money for students. According to this argument, given that all national assets have been privatized, the most viable existing parastatal was the pension scheme which could invest extensively in e.g. housing, office buildings, and shopping malls and so on that can be used to raise income. Other suggestions included the loan scheme to all students who should pay it back once they start work.

CONCLUSION

The students view protest as being driven by the desire to be heard and have their demands met by government and the management. Further, students believe the protests are caused by reluctance on part of those that are responsible to look into their plight for example, on matters that affect them during their academic life. The protests are mainly aimed at making sure that the government and other education stakeholders provide and fulfill their duties which have been agreed upon. There is need therefore to pay attention to the demands that students put across to the government. Yet complaints from students appear to fall on deaf ears hence the protests. But like all protests, despite originally planned to be peaceful, the results are not always as planned. As the trends in Zambia have shown the protests often turn into

violence. The study has revealed that pupils know that students know their rights and entitlements, hence, if their rights are not met, they have the reason to protest no matter the consequences of such protests. It is clear that pupils and students have a general understanding of their rights, freedoms and obligations. It is this knowledge that motivates or influences their participation in protests. The above findings have important theoretical implications. The first is that student protest are a common response and often the last resort for the oppressed people to try and free themselves from their apparent oppression. Underpinning these protests is the awareness of the entitlements of the protesters which they feel have been denied. As other research conducted elsewhere has shown students have been at the forefront of resistance to national governments. This study showed that the possession of civic knowledge seems to motivate rather than constrain the need to take part in student protests. For these students being aware of what is entitled to them and being denied that is a sufficient reason to protest especially if the entity that mandated to provide that is failing. From this, it is clear that Zambia students like elsewhere, mount informed protest aimed at a particular issue, for a specific aim and directed to specific audience-often the government.

The only way out of this is to claim what they rightly feel belong to them and the fastest way of doing this is by protesting. Students have extended their claims to include those affecting lecturers e.g. when lecturers are not paid their wages or allowances on time. According to the students, when lecturers are unhappy or are protesting, it's always the students who miss classes

Students and pupils suggested that the solution to student protest lies in timely disbursement of student's meal and book allowances which they strongly feel they are entitled to. To do this government must engage in various income generating activities e.g. through business ventures as well as the provision of loans to students so that when they start working, they can pay back. The police officers also should not use excessive force to address protests. The study shows that generally speaking the student's pupils have significant civic knowledge and understanding and often, they emphasize the need to protect what they see as their rights. The paper therefore argues that when citizens have an understanding of their civil rights, a denial of those rights has potential to result in protests. From this perspective, the causes of protests at Zambian university should not be interpreted as resulting from a lack of civic education but due to its possession. The introduction of civic education at both primary and secondary school since 2002 is

thus a good thing. This is surprising if on one hand, the findings indicate that possession of such knowledge is the cause of protests at university. Indeed, this needs to be qualified.

6.2 Recommendations

Following the above findings; the study recommends that;

- I. Ministry of Higher education must disburse student's meal and book allowances timely.
- II. The government of Zambia through Ministry of Higher education must engage in various income generating activities e.g. through business ventures as well as the provision of loans to students so that when they start working, they can pay back.
- III. There is also need for Ministry of Higher education to increase funding to Copperbelt University so as to address challenges that the University face.
- IV. The police officers also should not use excessive force to address protests

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