

STUDENT ACTIVISM AND THE REPOSITIONING OF THE GIRL CHILD IN ZIMBABWE'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS. THE CASE OF MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL 2000-2015".

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Abstract

Student activism through SRCs has been there ever since inception of universities the world over. These were meant to represent the students at the decision making structures of the Universities. In Zimbabwe Gender mainstreaming has been advocated when admitting students in tertiary education and a quota system favoring the girl child has been advanced by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. Despite all these efforts by Government and universities to encourage and promote female student to participate in student politics, there has however been a lack of gender equality in terms of female student representatives. Female students who partake in the SRC have always been fewer than males and when they do they take up submissive posts with the highest being the Vice Presidency. A number of factors have been alleged to have been the cause of this phenomenon, that is, cultural, economic, political and social .Culturally,Ruminants of the patriarch society still exist and have stifled female participation in all sector of the economy and this has affected female students to partake in student politics. Norms and values of a patriarchal society still exist, where male domination values are upheld and the women's space is confined to the private rather than the public sphere. The other internal factor that has harmed the female species from within is the known as the "Pull Her Down Syndrome" where females do little or nothing to empower each other but look down on each other and deliberately pull each other down publicly which maybe through hate speech.The participation of the female students is very minimal in student activism and decision making structures. However, an increase in enrolment has done very little in promoting the participation of the girl child in student activism. Thus, there is a need to promote their participation in student activism so they can be able to influence decisions and outcomes that affect their everyday lives in Tertiary institutions since they are the minority in terms of population size. Kurebwa (2013) also notes that the political presence of women is necessary for safeguarding that their interests, needs and concerns are incorporated in the policy process by their own input.

Key words: student politics, Patriarch, Activism, Participation , Public Policy Making Process, Gender Equality , Equity

Context of student Activism

Student Activism in Zimbabwe

Mlambo (2013) notes that in the history of Zimbabwe, students have significantly been involved in the fight for democracy as well as that of human rights. Indeed, much has been written on student activism in the country during the colonial and early independence years, with a focus mostly on student activities at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), for a long time the only university in the country. It has been widely noted that, from being supporters of the liberation struggle in the 1960s and 1970s, students became major allies of the ruling party in the immediate post-colonial years, before turning into its staunchest critics in the 1990s, as economic challenges, public corruption and misgovernment became prevalent in Zimbabwean society. Students also played an important role in opposition politics in the 1990s and beyond". He adds that "Student Activists have had to survive in exceedingly harsh political and economic conditions characterized by an increasingly repressive political regime which seems to regard student activists not as young men and women exercising their democratic rights, but as enemies of the state to be ruthlessly suppressed especially in the years 2000-2010".

Negombwe (2012) narrates the evolvement of student activism from the 1980s till 2008, however focusing on the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), he explains that in the 1980s the university authorities had cordial relations with students and timeously addressed their grievances until in 1990 when the government enacted the UZ Amendment Act which marked the turning point of student activism as it repressed the previously enjoyed autonomy of the students. He adds that the 1990s-2008 were marked by a change in the approach as it became confrontational as students organized violent demonstrations and became allies with external anti-government organizations such as joining the 2006 demonstration by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the One Million Man March in 2007 which included students from all the Universities in the country who wanted to fight against the corruption that had characterized the governance of the government as exhibited in the Willow vale Scandal. Negombwe narrates that the situation became worse after 2006 when the Government scrapped off the student grants. However up to present day the approach at UZ has not changed an example is the demonstration that the students held in solidarity with the lecturers and non-teaching staff on March 17th in 2015 which led to the shutdown of the campus until the 24th of March 2015 (Daily news 18/03/15). Whereas the repression by the administration at the Midlands State University helped return activism to an approach of the 1980s of engagement and dialogue from 2008 till present day.

Some scholars have however argued that student Activism has declined if not died with the passing of time. Taking an example from an article in The Independent newspaper: Citing Sources: [<http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2010/12/09/student-activism-slowly-dying-in-zim/>] with the title "Student activism slowly dying" lamented the decline of student activism at Zimbabwe's different universities and claimed that current student activism compared poorly with student protests throughout the colonial era and the immediate post-colonial era of student leaders. It argued that at that time students "made an important contribution to the struggle for democracy in the country" by demonstrating

against public corruption and human rights abuses and by providing a voice for the voiceless. According to Mlambo (2013 p.187):

Examples provided included student demonstrations against “corruption at Willowvale, the proposal to establish a one-party state, and the introduction of a Western-backed economic structural adjustment program in the early 90s and how the students joined forces with the National Constitutional Assembly and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions to defeat the government-led Godfrey Chidyausiku draft constitution in 2000.

Furthermore, Mlambo (2013 p.187) adds that

For former student activist, Earnest Mudzengi, student activism was, in fact, already dead. He maintained that it had been killed by the repressive UZ Amendment Act of 1990 which had given excessive powers to discipline both students and lecturers to government-appointed vice chancellors, thus effectively bringing institutions of higher learning directly under government control and destroying academic freedom. In his view, the UZ Amendment of 1990 made sure that student activism was taken to the graveyard. Students were disempowered economically so that they would cease to care about national issues but concentrate on their well-being only. Beggars do not become activists.

In agreement, Ndodzi and Mhlanga (2015) have observed that:

The glamour of student activism has rusted away slowly due to poor decisions of its leaders who were quick to embed the movement with opposition politics tainted by the Western regime change agenda. They add that Zimbabwe is not the only country to have youths give into a regime change agenda. The world has seen the role of youths who used the social media to inspire the Arab Spring that toppled leaders like Muammar Gaddafi and Hosni Mubarak

In his view Mlambo(2013 p.186) concludes that:

student activism among the current generation of students is not only much lower than in the past and noticeably declining but also that, unlike earlier generations, current students are mostly preoccupied with bread and butter issues and are not doing much to contribute to the fight for democracy and human rights. While conceding that, compared to earlier periods of coordinated, focused and broad-based student activism against the colonial dispensation, the current level of student activism is rather uncoordinated and not as effective.

In agreement, Ndzozi and Mhlanga (2015) state that “it has become common in institutions of higher learning that policies formulated by SRCs are arguably not student beneficial oriented but rather a reflection of regurgitated mainstream politics failed manifestos”

2.1.3 History of the Student Representative Council at the Midlands State University

The Student Representative council, herein (SRC) was established according to the Midlands State University Act Chapter 25:21 of 1999 as the Students’ Union. The Act

defines the Students' Union as any association of students recognized by the Council as the Students' Union. In addition, the Act also provides in Section 10(d) that the President of the Students' Union shall be an ex officio member of the University Council. With the passing of time the Union has been renamed to the Student Representative Council herein SRC which derives its powers from the University Act as well as its Constitution, the SRC Constitution. The Constitution preamble states that the Council must be established among students deriving their powers from the consent of the students in securing their Rights as enshrined in the SRC Constitution. The Constitution determines the Student Representative Council of the Midlands State University as the primary governing body on all issues of student governance. Constitution preamble which states that the Council must be established among students deriving their powers from the consent of the students in securing their Rights as enshrined in the SRC Constitution. The Constitution determines the Student Representative Council of the Midlands State University as the primary governing body on all issues of student governance. Therefore the SRC has been a buffer between the students and the administration, thus a tool of student activism.

The Midlands State University has had SRCs ever since inception in 2000 through the Midlands State University Act of 1999. These were meant to represent the students at the decision making structures of the University which include, according to the yearbook Committees, the Senate and the Council being the highest. The Student Representative Council consists of fourteen members who are elected into office according to Part IV Articles 31-38 which prescribe the appointment of an Electoral College and the criteria to be followed in the process, election time frame, requirement for one to be a candidate, electoral system, voting procedure, campaigning rules, voter's conduct, required poll as well as the results and reports of the elections. The structure and composition of the council are also outlined in the constitution ,Article 10 provides that; The Student Representative Council shall consist of a total number of fourteen elected members which include; President, Vice President, Secretary General, Minister of Finance, Minister of Academic Affairs, Minister of Information and Publicity, Minister of Legal and Constitutional affairs, Minister of Gender and Social Affairs, Minister of Sports and Recreation, Minister of Health and Food, Minister of International Affairs, Minister of Cultural and Religious Affairs, Minister of Physically Challenged, Minister of Resident and Non-Resident students. According to the constitution, the top six posts automatically become the Executive Members of the council.

There has however been a lack of gender equality in terms of female student representatives. Female students who partake in the SRC have always been fewer than males and when they do they take up submissive posts with the highest being the Vice Presidency. In an interview, the Executive Dean of Students Mr. Chaka expressed that "The SRC has never had an elected female President until in the 2015 elections, the only time there was a female President was in 2005 when she was acting after the President had been expelled from school"

FIG 2.1 Midlands State University SRCs in Pictures



SRC 2003: There were only two female students



SRC 2013: Four female students holding the positions of Vice President, Academic Affairs, Food and Health and Gender and Social Affairs



SRC 2015: Five female students including for the first time the President then Academic Affairs, Food & Health, Gender and Social Affairs and Physically Challenged and Vulnerable Groups

Correlation between Enrollment In Terms Of Gender and Student Activism in Tertiary Institutions

Kapungu, R.S (2007) suggests that an increase in the enrolment of the girl child may promote their meaningful contribution to student activism, echoing the words of the former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan who strongly advocated for the education of the girl child. In addition, she mentions factors that hinder women from accessing higher education such as limited resources, cultural stereotypes and marrying early.

However, Post-independence policy making in Zimbabwe has been targeted towards addressing such social injustices through promoting Gender Equity and Equality. One way has been through the educational empowerment of the girl child through the enactment policies such as the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation's (ZIMPREST) whose implementation included the lowering of enrolment requirements and standards for females than those of their male counterparts. Statistics by UNESCO for the Zimbabwe Education for All Policy Towards 2015 in 2002 show that the enrolment of females in tertiary education was significantly low as they made up only 33% of the total enrolment in tertiary institutions compared to the 67% of males.

Midlands State University has a Gender Policy which has been used as measure of increasing the enrolment of the Girl Child. The Students Records show that in 2010,

female enrolment was 4326, it rose to 7399 in 2012 and 9057 in the year 2015. However, participation of the female students has been minimal. Mbongo and Ngaling (2007) conclude that the position of females in relation to males in African Universities is not in any way different to that of women in the society in general. In agreement, Gaidzanwa and Manyeruke(2012) observe that even though so much has been done to give the girl child access to tertiary education, male domination is still very high in the tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. They however conclude that this phenomenon has been seen even in countries where women have been accepted to higher education for more than a century such as Sweden.

This minimal participation has been a pattern ever since the beginning of student activism through the SRC at Midlands State University as has been shown above in the background. This may not have been an issue when the university was opened in 1999 because of the small student population that was there and at that time the enrolment of the girl child was also minimal (See Table 1 for statistics as provided by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education in 2002). According to the MSU Yearbook (2011), the University had a total enrolment of 400 (Four Hundred) students when it was opened on 27th of March in 2000. Due to the inevitable winds of change to modernization that brought about feminism in the International forum, strategies of affirmative action and gender mainstreaming were formulated which also infiltrated into the African society that was very patriarchal as a result of culture. In the case of Zimbabwe, there was the formulation of ZIMPREST as mentioned earlier on. This led to the increase in enrolment of the girl child in higher and tertiary education. Midlands State University has a Gender Policy which has been used as measure of increasing the enrolment of the Girl Child. The Students Records show that in 2010, female enrolment was 4326, it rose to 7399 in 2012 and 9057 in the year 2015.

TABLE 2.1: TERTIARY ENROLLMENT STATISTICS PROVIDED BY THE MIN OF HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION IN 2002

CATEGORY	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL ENROLMENT	TOTAL PERCENTAGE
Technical and Vocational Training Colleges	11 018	67.4	5 340	32.6	16 358	100%
Universities(except Zimbabwe Open University)	14 662	67.3	7 108	32.7	21 770	100%
Teacher's Colleges	8027	44.6	9977	55.4	18 004	100%

GRAND TOTAL OF ENROLLMENT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS					53 360	100%
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Source: Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education 2002

The low percentage shows that most problems that affect the students tend to reflect more on the girl child because they are the minority on campus yet they are the most vulnerable. The problems may include; high tuition and accommodation fees, weak policies pertaining to health, security and safety of the students as well as gender blind procedures from the administration such as the unanimous two tissue rolls per month for both sexes as women will need more tissue than men. Therefore the only way that the problem can be resolved is the participation of the girl child in student activism so as to be able to influence outcomes and the highest level in tertiary institutions.

Female Students and Political Activism

Howell and Mulligan (2005) propose that sometimes female students tend to be actively involved only in the grassroots support of student activism, not taking up positions, suggesting that women are usually sidelined from mainstream national politics, hence they have found refuge in actively participating in local governance for example in community based organizations or campaigning. Basing on this, they observe that this is the environment through which female activists and feminists have expressed their demands and lobbied for issues such as voting, marriage and land rights as well as domestic violence. This therefore shows that females do participate in student activism, however largely in terms of support but not taking up positions.

At independence, women's participation in the liberation struggle was recognized through the enactment of laws such as the Legal Majority Age Act granting women voting rights for the first time, the Sex Disqualification Act that enabled women to hold public office and the Equal Pay Act (Ziyambi, 1997 cited in Kurebwa 2013). According to Kurebwa (2013), these laws were passed by the government partly as a result of pressure from women leaders within the ruling party ZANU-PF and partly out of the government's own will.

At independence women were for the first time in the history of the country officially recognized as an oppressed group and as such were the target of a conscious government policy to change their situation. The government wanted to transform the status of women so that they could assume their rightful position in society and work alongside their male counterparts in the development of the nation. As soon as it became a member of the United Nations and the African Union, the government ratified a number of international and regional instruments and protocols that had a strong bearing on the status of women (Tichagwa, 1998 cited in Kurebwa 2013). The idea was to eliminate all customary, social, economic and legal constraints that inhibited women's full participation in the development of the country.

Therefore this shows that much has been done to emancipate women in the Zimbabwean society, hence also reflecting on the situation in tertiary institutions at the local level where female students have had spaces created for them to participate in student activism thereby transforming their lives and those of their male counterparts through lobbying and advocating for social, political and economic changes on campus.

National Perceptions and Student Activism

According to Block (1969) et al. students in general are perceived as the elite of the society who reject the traditional values of society and even values due to the academic freedom which they would have been exposed to at University. Thus when they engage in their activities of influencing outcomes in their favor they are seen as rebellious. In agreement, Altbach (1966 p.175) notes that in developed nations the number of students is large and students are seen as an important and privileged group that is very much often alienated from the rest of its peer group by greatly opposed experiences. He further observes that this isolation usually makes the student community independent and uncertain of its roots. In addition students have had build up their own cultures since developing states have not yet developed established patterns of contemporary educational, political and social behavior. He talks about how governments are conscious of the possible influence of the student population; hence they try to control it or in some instances repress its leadership through threats of suspension of government scholarships or close the universities for a certain period of time. Thus explaining the introduction of the Fees ordinance in Zimbabwe and suspension of the grants to university students in the mid-2000s as measures of quelling student activism which was increasingly becoming anti- the government as well as the closure of the University of Zimbabwe for two weeks in March 2015 after students had engaged in a joint demonstration with staff members against the administration.

Factors That Repel Female Students from Student Activism

Socialization and Education Policy

According to Adams and Dyson (2007), Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) suggests that the reason why women often feel ill-fit for roles outside the family is that they are not given the opportunity to develop their talents through education. They are taught to be adjuncts to men in a world largely conditioned by male values. She adds that women are submissive, light minded, emotional, susceptible to flattery and so on because they are taught to be, meaning that femininity is socially constructed and conditioned. This therefore explains the effect of socio-cultural phenomenon such as Patriarchy to the participation of the girl child in student activism.

Legislation

In agreement, Ring (2009) gave a summary of John Stuart Mill's essay entitled, "The Subjection of Women" in 1869 which was advocating for a condition of equality between the sexes. In his essay he proposed that the limits imposed on women are against the basic tenets of liberalism which advocates for seeing people primarily as individuals. According to him, the suppression of women emanated from Legislation, taking note that during his time the Victorian women were not recognized as legal persons. Women had to seek the approval and signature of their father or husband in order to get into any legal

agreements or even when they were purchasing large items.

Philosophy

Generally, the Philosophy that is being studied has placed women in a certain subservient position to their male counterparts and this has affected perception. Unlike his predecessors such as Plato, Mill argued that moral excellence must be regarded as the same in a woman as in a man. According to Smith (1983) Plato states that women who belong to the upper classes must be given equal roles to those of men. However only one generation later, according to Miller (1995), Aristotle, in his book "Politics", puts back females to their customary roles in the home, sub-serving their male counterparts. Plato's position in the Republic is based on the view that women and men have the same nature in respect to the guardianship of the state, except for the fact that one is stronger than the other as nature does not give such equality. In his book, the Politics, Aristotle utterly declares, that when it comes to sexes, the male is naturally superior and the female inferior, hence the male rules and the female becomes the subject.

Perception of the death of Feminism

Some scholars have proclaimed that there is generally a death of the feminist revolution on campus in tertiary institutions Powroznik (2014) notes that According to some accounts, today's young women refuse to identify as feminists, largely because they believe gender equality has already been achieved. However, Alison Crossley, a postdoctoral fellow at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research argues that campus culture shapes feminist activity because. "When we think about how a movement persists," explains Crossley, "we must understand how it is dependent on its environment." Therefore explaining how the culture of the institution may be a factor in determining the activity of the girl child in student activism. She adds on to say that "Their campus cultures, their past histories of feminism and activism, and the presence of on-campus opposition affected feminist students' challenges, goals, and strategies". The above explored literature shows that a lot has been said and done in terms of uplifting, conscientising and emancipating women in terms of civil, political, legal and education rights. The classical feminist philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollestonecraft advocated for the freedom of women in terms of law and access to higher education. According to them, if women could have access to legal and academic freedom, they would automatically be free and empowered hence this would enable them participate in politics and influence decisions and outcomes. This was in accordance to Plato who postulated that man can only be free if they partake in politics and civil society. In addition, the philosopher Hegel, referred to civil society as the sphere of pursuit of self-interest. Therefore in this context civil society may be likened to student activism in tertiary institutions where students pursue to achieve and fulfill their rights.

However this research seeks to explain why even after gaining access to Higher Education, women still lag behind in terms of participating in student activism, paying particular attention to the case of Midlands State University Student Representative Council.

2.1.8 Student Activism and National Politics

According to Ndodzi and Mhlanga (2015 p.85)

the revolutionarization of student politics in Zimbabwe post 1999 era when the peers of LearnmoreJongwe, Nelson Chamisa and TendaiBiti became opposition activists has marked the end to separation of student politics and mainstream politics through their active participation in the formation of the movement for Democratic Change (MDC) which introduced a major clash between the ruling party ZANU-PF and the student movement. Furthermore, they argue that the major political student movements of ZICOSU and ZINASU have become extensions of political party mileages in managing political ambitions in institutions of higher learning, thereby turning students into political tools.

Altbach (1966 p.175) argues that “in many of these so-called societies, students assume political responsibility even before finishing their studies, thus bringing national politics onto the campuses in a very direct way”.

This has done nothing except kill the student movement as well as dividing the students amongst themselves based on political affiliation. Students have tended to focus more on their political advancement through the student movements. In some cases they have been a pathway for preparing student leaders into national political leaders. Lipset (1966 p.132) argues that a significant number of the political leadership is most likely to emanate from university graduates. Altbach (1966 p. 175) notes the role and success of student movements in other countries in overthrowing governments and changing policies as well as how students have partaken the leadership to national liberation movements, political parties, labor organizations and culture groups.

In Zimbabwe this can be seen in the role played by the student movement during the liberation struggle when young people chose to drop out of school to join others in the training camps which were as far as Mozambique to join the armed struggle which led to the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, in the late 1990s they joined the ZCTU demonstration against Government, later on they made allies with various civil society organizations in the one million man march against the corrupt governance which led to the government enacting the UZ Amendment and their collaboration with ZCTU and the National Constitutional Assembly in the successful “NO Vote” campaign against the ZANU PF proposed constitution of 2000 which was allegedly a weapon meant to further consolidate the power of President Robert Mugabe and the ruling party ZANU PF as well as their collaboration with ZCTU, NCA and other democracy advocating Civil Society Organizations which led to the formation of a major vibrant opposition political party in the history of Zimbabwe Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Therefore this shows a strong link between student activism and national politics.

Participation of women in other spheres and levels of politics in general

According to Kurebwa (2013), “The last three decades of the 20th century witnessed a significant change in women’s share of representation and participation in political, economic and social activities”. The role of women has now become discernible in every sphere of life (Carli and Eagly, 2001; Jabeen and Iqbal, 2010 cited in Kurebwa 2013). These shifts have been due to the worldwide awareness campaigns through the media, feminist movements, better access to opportunities such as education, health, employment and women’s self-fulfillment in contributing to the democratic governance process (Agbalajobi, 2008).

Table2.2: Number of women in politics in Zimbabwe since 2000

2000				2008			2013		
Level of decision making	Total	Women	% Women	Total	Women	% Women	Total	Women	% Women
House of Assembly	150	14	9.3	150	24	16.0	210	25	11.9
Senate	-	-	-	80	21	26.3	80	36	45
Women's Quota	-	-	-	-	-	-	60	60	100
Combined Parliament	150	14	9.3	216	45	20.8	350	114	32.5
Cabinet	60	9	15	64	11	17.1	50	7	14
Local Authorities	2500	320	12.8	2500	355	14.2	1989	280	14.0

Source: Government of Zimbabwe (2013)

The Table above shows the total number of women who have been elected into decision-making positions since 2000. The table indicates that Zimbabwe has not achieved parity in any area of political decision-making and in fact has not achieved or come close to the initial target of 30% as envisioned in the National Gender Policy of Zimbabwe. The table shows some decline since 2008 in cabinet representation (from 17.1% in 2008 to 14% in 2013) and a slight decrease in local government (from 14.2% in 2008 to 14.07% in 2013). However, there has been regression in the House of Assembly. The combined result is that women's representation at the national level has declined from 20.8% in 2008 to 11.9% in 2013 (The Herald 8 August 2013 cited in Kurebwa 2013).

Thereby showing that the low or minimal participation of the female students in tertiary institutions is but just a reflection of what is happening at the national level in terms of women's participation in politics. Looking at Midlands State University SRC the percentage of women participation has not reached even 50%.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A concept is a general expression of a particular phenomenon. The major theories that will be explored in the research are the Feminist theory, the Social Cognitive Theory and the theory of Social Loafing.

Radical Feminism

Radical Feminism suggests that Patriarchal relationships are considered to have paved the way for Capitalist forms of economic and gender exploitation, hence sexual inequality

is institutionalized in society. Therefore, it is not possible to achieve sexual equality through legal means or by "changing people's attitudes". In addition, it suggests that Men are the enemy of women. Women are a sex class in that they share a common interest in freeing themselves from male oppression. The applicability of this theory has been seen in the report that was produced by the Student Solidarity Trust on Livelihoods Situational Analysis of University of Zimbabwe Female Students. The study revealed that during the 2006-2009 crises, whereby female students survived on staying with their boyfriends, being given tuition and rent money by their boyfriends, sugar daddies and married men to survive. The report concluded that female students are economically dependent on their male counterparts and this limits their capacity to represent other females in the SRC. This affects their access to resources, time as well as popularity for the campaigns.

Social Cognitive Theory of Personality

Bandura (1999) propounded the social cognitive theory of personality. This theory can be used to explain how sometimes participation of female students in activism is an internally driven motive to change the environment in which they live to be more favorable and suitable for themselves. The theory suggests that people are agentic operators in their life course not just on looking hosts of internal mechanisms orchestrated by environmental events. They are sentient agents of experiences rather than simply under goers of experiences. The sensory, motor and cerebral systems are tools people use to accomplish the tasks and goals that give meaning and direction to their lives.

Social Cognitive Theory of Gender development and Differentiation

Bussey& Bandura, (1999) propounded the Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. The theory suggests that the internal and inferior self-perceptions that women have of themselves are a result of societal gender-typing. Thus it is the primary basis on which people get differentiated with pervasive effects on their daily lives. According to Berscheid, (1993) gender differentiation takes on added importance because many of the attributes and roles selectively promoted in males and females tend to be differentially valued with those ascribed to males generally being regarded as more desirable, effectual and of higher status.

Bandura, (1986), also adds that, although some gender differences are biologically founded most of the stereotypic attributes and roles linked to gender arise more from cultural design than from biological endowment. However, Fonow and Cook (2005) generally argue that gender is a social construct and challenge the determinism of sex. Sandra Harding (1987) brings up a Standpoint Theory which argues that in a society marked out by different forms of oppression, marginalized peoples have different perspectives and accounts based on their experiences and struggles. This theory explains why some female students may be motivated to participate than others based on other factors such as background, socialization and economic status among others.

Theory of Social Loafing

Psychologists talk about the theory of Social Loafing whose main thrust or tenet is that people tend to put way less effort towards achieving a certain goal when they are part of a group than they would if they were working alone because everyone will be working towards achieving the same thing, hence they will look upon the other to do more work.

This theory therefore explains why sometimes the Women Movement may be failing to work collectively to motivate female students to take part in student politics as they will keep looking on the next one to take up the challenge with some individuals not even willing to try and looking down upon themselves or simply choosing to be ignorant or reluctant towards participation with the mindset that others will do it. An example of how much more effort one person tends to put if they are working as an individual and achieve more is that of Rosa Parks, a female African-American activist who refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger which spurred the Montgomery bus boycotts to end racial segregation during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement of the black people in America.

Participation Vs Representation

Kurebwa (2013) talks of the existence of a difference between Participation and Representation, yet these terms have been historically used interchangeably. He also argues that Representation does not guarantee an increase in participation. Mtintso (1999 cited in Kurebwa 2013) explains that “Representation focuses merely on the number of women in decision-making positions and is therefore only part of the story. Participation looks at what women do when they get into these decision-making positions”. This research has thus far shown that there is minimal representation of female students in the SRC at the Midlands State University however now there is the need to assess the level of participation for those who hold positions.

The Constitution of the SRC which is the Governing piece of legislation lays out the fourteen portfolios that make up the Council as already highlighted earlier on. Article 11 explains the functions, duties and powers of every portfolio. The University Year Book clearly states that the University shall be administered through Committees and it is the duty of every member of the SRC to attend those Committees that are in line with their portfolio, hence promoting participation at all levels for example the Minister of Residence seats in the Residence Committee, Minister of Academic Affairs seats in the University Senate and the Fees Revision Committee. The President seats in most committees and sub-committees of the Senate, the Senate and the University Council. However, the SRC Constitution is silent on the duties and roles of other portfolios such as the Minister of Gender and Social Affairs as well as the Minister of Physically Challenged and Vulnerable Groups which are just stated in Article 11(12&13 respectively), Hence this limits their level of participation. The Vice President’s main duty is to be the Chairperson of the Finance Committee whose decisions are subject to approval by the President as if not enough the Vice President only becomes functional in the absence of the President.

Looking at the history of the SRCs, female students have pre-occupied stereotypical positions such as Minister of Gender and Social Affairs, Minister of Food and Health, Minister of Sports and Recreation, Minister of Academic Affairs and the Vice Presidency, some of which have been rendered useless by the SRC Constitution. However History at the Institution shows that the Ministry of Academic Affairs has been held by female students since 2013 and they have brought change to the academic sphere of the students’ lives; Tuition Fees has remained the same and constant from 2013-2016, only with changes on the Ancillaries such as the additional \$50 Dissertation Fee that is paid by all Level 4:2s, in addition ever-since 2013 the University has been lenient enough to allow as many students to seat for examinations without paying the three quarters that is

stipulated in the Registration Procedures. In some instances the University has lowered the required minimum balance to as low as \$50, sometimes it has allowed those who would not have paid anything for the current semester but not owing in arrears to sit for examinations, however the July –November 2015 semester made history when the University went to the further extent of saying those who owed up to a maximum of \$750 from previous semesters could also sit for examinations. With the opening of the Zvishavane Campus in July 2015 and having a Female President for the first time, the SRC managed to go around the satellite campuses of Zvishavane and Mutare as well as the Gweru main Campus holding Students' Consultative Forums, launch a functioning Webpage and a Facebook page within the first hundred days in office thereby promoting a stakeholder inclusive approach. Being a member of the University Council, the President also successfully lobbied for the approval of the construction of the first University Chapel since its inception in 2000. In addition, the Minister of Gender of the SRC 2015 who was also female held a massive Awareness campaign on the Sexual Harassment Policy across all campuses in early 2016, for the first time in the history of the University. Records from the Sports Department also show that in 2003-4 the University was number one in all disciplines when the Secretary for Sports was female. Therefore the above evidence shows that Female students do not only represent but also actively participate when given the chance to be in student activism.

Methodology

The research methodology took a Case Study approach, using the Midlands State University Student Representative Council. A Case Study is one technique which the research used for the in-depth examination of a single instance or a few instances of the social phenomenon as well as to gather the data. The focus was on the Midlands State University; Student Representative Council. Case Studies help in revealing the occurrence of a pattern in a phenomenon. Thus the method was instrumental in showing whether the minimal representation of female students in student activism is a pattern or not. The research was more qualitative in nature based on the phenomena under study, the January-June registered student of 18839 was used as the target population, non-probability sampling methods were used such as convenience, quota and purposive sampling. The research was deductive in approach; thus it seeks to validate a theory by providing empirical data. In addition the research was also explanatory in nature as it seeks to explain the "why" questions about the participation of female students in student politics. On the other hand, the research is explorative as it seeks to break new ground to the academic field through particularly focusing on the female students in the broad spectrum of Student Activism, thereby making the research to be also feminist. . Extensive desktop review was undertaken from (records of SRC elections candidates from 2000 till date, SRC elections reports of results, the University's Student Records for statistics of the total population of the students as this would be needed in the sample design, photographs, position papers, press statements and newspaper articles), Key informants interviews and observations were held to gather data on the subject under study.

Major findings

- There is general consensus that, the positive evolvement of student activism has repositioned the female student from a point where it was impenetrable to them due to its revolutionary, violent, hooligan nature, to a point where the environment is now conducive and enabling hence creating spaces for the female students through rules and regulations that prohibit discrimination and violence against women in general from the International level which requires all elections to be free and fair by prohibiting violence and allowing all sexes an equal chance of participation.
- Societal perception, lack of female support base, personality, economic dependence and patriarchy inhibit female participation in student politics. Those who partake in Activism are viewed as stubborn and prostitutes who have to sleep their way to the top in order to survive in politics. This has also been linked to Culture and Religion as agents of societal values where the kitchen is the place for a woman and she must not be seen active in the public space such that those who have participated in politics have been seen as having loose or no morals.
- The bible also places women in a subservient position to men hence any woman who seems to challenge the status quo in society or churches is seen as a Hypocrite or Heathen. Societal perceptions have also affected the socialization of female students who from child hood are taught certain values such as that politics is a dirty game that can only be handled by men, women should not be seen getting involved in such dirty acts as they are by nature soft hearted and incorruptible. In addition, Shvedova argues that “In some countries, women perceive politics as a ‘dirty’ game. This has jarred their confidence in their ability to participate in political processes”
- This research has shown that females do participate, however their participation is minimal and that there is a direct relationship between student activism and national politics. According to the Registrar Mr Mupfiga the university is where students teeth to be national leaders, meaning that the SRC is a microcosm of main stream politics for example Learnmore Jongwe, Edson Zvobgo, Anastacia Ndlovu, Nelson Chamisa, Sekai Holland and most of the Liberation Heroes who joined the liberation struggle whilst as students and formed the Revolutionary Party ZANU PF which has been the governing party in Zimbabwe since independence. Another respondent added that politics is the participation of people in issues that affect their everyday lives hence activism is politics at the institutional level. The minimal participation of female students in student politics is not only peculiar to the campus as it purely reflects the minimal representation of women in politics in other general levels of politics.
- The infiltration of national politics on campus through the political student movements which are extensions of political parties on campus, has polarized the student body including female students who now see each other as competition instead of comrades in the same struggle of improving student welfare, thereby weakening the spirit of student activism.

Recommendations

- The Government should make the environment conducive for student leaders to discharge their duties effectively for example through policies, laws and use of security state apparatus. If the environment becomes favorable we may see more female students partaking in student activism.
- The University Administration and the relevant departments of Student Affairs and Security should motivate female students through creating a conducive environment for students to hold free, fair and peaceful elections on campus without gender bias. In addition the female candidates who make it through should be celebrated at the Institution level in order to create role models who could motivate other aspiring female students; the spillover effect could also be seen in other institutions.
- The student body has to be united amongst themselves and not be divided based on class and political affiliation as it only deviates their attention from constructive development issues to improve their lives as a body on campus thereby improving their learning environment. Sometimes UBAs are bitter that USAs reject them for NABAs (former students who have joined the working class) hence they do not support their female counterparts.
- Female students should deconstruct the stereotypes associated with leadership and student activism being masculine and support each other instead of pulling each other down as well as be confident enough to take up positions. The research has shown that the presence of a strong female support base is one of the motivating factors for the participation of females in student or national politics.
- The media should be analytical and project real issues, that is, research. Since media plays such an influential role in information dissemination there is need for the promotion of female participation in politics, projecting positive issues other than negative ones for example an article that was published in the Herald newspaper on the 14th April 2015 entitled “MSU Students Spread HIV/AIDS” which negatively portrayed the female students thereby minimizing their support from amongst their female and male counterparts through labeling each other as “prostitutes”. In addition the media should also publish women who are successful in politics as much as possible so as to motivate the upcoming ones that it is possible.
- Society is where students come from and where they will return upon completion of their studies hence they must instill gender sensitive values and deconstruct gender stereotypes which have since been challenged in modern day society standards.
- There is need for the quota system to be introduced in the Constitutions of the Student Unions in Zimbabwe’s Tertiary institutions, in order to increase the participation and the representation of female students. This could start at the highest level of the Institution’s Gender Policy, if there is one in place.
- Successful female leaders at every level should be widely celebrated in order to create role models for young women who may be aspiring to get into politics or leadership positions. This could be done by the various mediums of media, civil

society and vibrant women's interest groups. This could assist with information dissemination even to the periphery communities so they know that it is possible.

- The breeding of political movements which are off springs of main stream political parties should impeded at all costs on campus as it enhances the infiltration of national political agendas which divides students and eventually weakens student activism as students cannot organize themselves with one voice. This also manifests in the disunity of the female students based on political affiliation thus limiting their chances of assuming positions in student activism..
- The infiltration of national politics on campus through the political student movements which are extensions of political parties on campus, has polarized the student body including female students who now see each other as competition instead of comrades in the same struggle of improving student welfare, thereby weakening the spirit of student activism.

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Conclusion

Female participation in student activism has evolved over time due to conducive legal framework that has been put in place by government and university administration. The evolvement of activism has led female student to be able to represent and participate in decision making processes and structures that affect and determine their day to day lives. Despite the increased involvement of female students in activism, factors such as the patriarch system, economic dependence and lack of a support base has affected their activism and thus why despite increased enrolment, there is still minimal participation of female students in student politics. The minimal participation of female students in student politics is not only peculiar to the campus as it purely reflects the minimal representation of women in politics in other general levels of politics.