Original Article

Understanding the Complexity of the Causes of Student Activism in Higher Education Using the Case of Makerere University

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the complexities and causes of student activism at Makerere University, Uganda, using Altbach's theory of student activism as its guiding framework. A qualitative approach to research was used to collect data. The research involved 14 purposively sampled participants. Among these, were eight student leaders and six university administrators, who were interviewed to provide insights into the dynamics of student activism. Thematic analysis revealed key issues driving activism, such as demands for transparency, concerns over tuition increments, inadequate infrastructure, and limited academic freedom. Findings highlight frequent power struggles between student leaders and administrators, often resulting in stalemates that hinder meaningful reforms. The study recommends that student leaders focus on developing leadership and negotiation skills, fostering unity, engaging in constructive dialogue, and prioritizing inclusive representation. Similarly, university administrators are encouraged to establish open communication channels, involve students in decision-making, address their concerns promptly, promote transparency, and support student leadership development. These recommendations aim to foster collaborative engagement and create a harmonious academic environment. By shedding light on the root causes and dynamics of student activism, the study contributes to policy development and strategic approaches for managing activism constructively.

INTRODUCTION

Student activism is inseparable from higher education institutions due to its social, cultural, and religious impact on these institutions. Student activism can cause discord or harmonious change in universities and society at large. This makes it necessary for managers and administrators to take it upon themselves to comprehend matters related to this phenomenon. In this regard, "Activism is the collective public expression of ideas by students aimed at creating politically pertinent public debate on a topic or topics and seeking to bring about moderate, radical or even revolutionary changes" (Luescher, 2018, pg. 300). Student activism has for a long time been an important part of university life serving as a front for students to air their concerns, advocate for change and engage in various activities affecting student's life.

Student activism has deep historical roots, originating in the classical University of Paris and the University of Bologna during the 13th century (Miller & Tolliver, 2017). At these institutions, tensions between students and local communities gave rise to the "town-gown" conflict, as students, identified by their distinctive gowns and use of Latin, became a target of social friction (Harley, 2020). The spread of universities across Europe and the Americas saw similar developments. For example, Harvard University experienced the "Butter Rebellion" in 1776, a strike over poor food quality, which escalated following the suspension of students demanding better conditions (Perraton, 2014). Similarly, a 1924–1925 strike at Fisk University in Nashville arose from student dissatisfaction with administrative decisions regarding the university magazine and sports funding, resulting in violent protests (Pisnes, 2011). The 1964–1965 Berkeley protests in California marked a pivotal moment in U.S. student activism, with students advocating for political engagement beyond campus. While initial demonstrations were peaceful, police intervention with pepper spray incited violence (Kehdinga, 2017; Maira & Sze, 2012). In Europe, student activism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often aligned with socialist and anarchist movements, challenging established socio-political systems (Aronowitz & Giroux, 2000).

Post-World War II, European students became central to anti-war and civil rights movements, exemplified by the May 1968 protests in France. These demonstrations united students and workers in demanding greater freedoms and social reforms, inspiring similar movements across Italy, Germany, and the UK (Tarrow, 1998; Kurlansky, 2007). Contemporary student activism in Europe continues to shape political and social discourse. Spanish students were instrumental in the 2011 Indignados protests, advocating for democracy and social justice (Klein, 2019), while UK students have campaigned against tuition fee increases and for greater representation in university governance (Rhoads, 2016). These historical and modern examples underscore the enduring significance of student activism as a force for societal transformation.

In sub-Saharan Africa, several instances of activism started as early as the 1940s, attributed to the quest for independence (Balsvik, 1998). This process of student activism continued throughout the 1960s when almost all African countries experienced waves of activism by students because of social, economic, cultural, and political injustices (Fomunyam & Rahming, 2017). Several instances of activism started as early as the 1940s, attributed to the quest for independence (Balsvik, 1998). This process of student activism continued throughout the 1960s when almost all African countries experienced waves of activism by students because of social, economic, cultural, and political injustices (Fomunyam & Rahming, 2017). According to Mlambo (2013), student activism in Zimbabwe existed in earlier periods but this was not well-coordinated and unified. In the 1980s, student activists in Zimbabwe where people saw themselves as defenders of the revolution in which they had played a role of supporting the independence of the nation, which they regarded as their own. Mlambo argues that student activism continued despite persistent efforts by state agencies to violently counter-reactions to student protests and in spite of the increasing economic problems confronting the students. However, in the period between 2000 and 2010. Mlambo (2013) confirms that cases of student activism were mainly driven by economic grievances. According to Mlambo, Zimbabwe witnessed an economic meltdown and political

challenges which influenced the nature and forms of student responses. In this period, students were faced with severe and deepening economic hardships whereby some of them were almost reduced to destitute levels because of the economic situation then, and the withdraw of government financial support to the students further worsened the situation.

Luqman (2017) outlines the history of student activism in Nigerian higher education in three distinct phases. The first phase, during the colonial period starting in 1925, saw the formation of the West African Students' Union, which focused on fighting colonialism and advocating for the independence of West African nations. This period marked the birth of student activism in Nigerian universities. The second phase was characterized by the formation of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), a national body aimed at preserving the legacy of student unionism established during the nationalist struggles. The third phase began in 1981 with the establishment of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) after the civilian government of President Shehu Shagari lifted the ban on student union activities. Since then, student movements have formed alliances with pro-democracy groups and labor unions, advocating for democratic governance and social justice. Luqman notes that Nigerian students have frequently protested against military dictatorship and military rule, highlighting issues such as the fight for democratic leadership, resource distribution, economic challenges, government corruption, and the commercialization of higher education.

In Kenya, student activism was synonymous with comrades' power since the struggle for independence and the return to multi-party democracy. Kiboyi (2013) pointed out that between 1990 and 2000 there were 47 cases of violent student activism cases characterized by clashes with police and wanton destruction of property. The presence of student activism in Kenyan universities has made a strong lasting impact on Kenya politics. This has been stressed by Macharia (2015) who stated that student leaders were powerful figures in the country and that the government of the day kept vigil over student activism to the extent of placing spies in major universities, and former President Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi knew the names of the student leaders in all the campuses by name. In addition, when the fight for the return of multiparty democracy in Africa intensified, students joined opposition leaders like Kenneth Matiba, Raila Odinga (Senior), and Charles Rubia in the struggle.

In Uganda, the landscape of student activism beyond Makerere University—its oldest and most historically significant institution remains underexplored, largely due to the relatively recent establishment of most universities. Nonetheless, key incidents across various universities highlight the prevalence of student protests as a response to administrative decisions and financial grievances (Kasozi,2015), At Gulu University, student activism has centered around solidarity and financial concerns. For instance, in October 2019, students planned a peaceful demonstration in support of Makerere University students protesting a 15% tuition increase. Similarly, in November 2021, Gulu University students protested a reduction in living allowances from UGX 880,000 (USD 237) to UGX 670,000 (USD 200), resulting in the detention of two students. Kyambogo University students have also engaged in protests, as seen on May 2, 2023, when they demonstrated against inadequate infrastructure and delayed government allowances, which had severely impacted their welfare. In Western Uganda, students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) protested the delayed release of living and faculty allowances, which left 205 students locked out of their hostels, underscoring the severity of the situation (Mayega 2015). Makerere University, however, remains the epicenter of student activism in Uganda, with a storied history of political and social engagement. Fred Guweddeko's article in The Independent (September 21, 2006) recounts a pivotal moment in the 1940s when Yusufu Kironde Lule, a former Ugandan president, was expelled from Makerere for contesting a decision to abolish elections for the Head Prefect position. His subsequent scholarship to study in South Africa highlights the colonial administration's attempts to suppress dissent and avoid further confrontation. These incidents collectively demonstrate that student activism in Ugandan

universities often emerges in response to financial inequities, inadequate infrastructure, and administrative decisions perceived as unjust. Despite being less documented than Makerere, newer universities are developing their own histories of activism, reflecting broader patterns of youth-led demands for accountability and systemic reform.

Makerere University has a long history of significant student activism, often marked by violent incidents. For example, in 1952, students protested over poor food quality, an issue unresolved by Principal De Bunsen (Byaruhanga, 2006). In 1965, they demonstrated at the American Embassy, opposing U.S. involvement in African affairs and Congo's violation of Uganda's borders. The 1976 protests under President Idi Amin's military regime led to arrests and torture of students (Byaruhanga, 2006). More recently, violent clashes at Makerere have intensified. A fatal altercation occurred between members of the National Unity Platform (NUP) and the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) at Nsibirwa Hall (Ainomugisha, 2024; Kakembo, 2023). Additionally, protests were reported in 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2014 (Mande & Nakayiza, 2015). The 2019 demonstrations against a 15% tuition increase also turned violent (Masaba, 2019). These recurrent incidents highlight the urgent need for deeper analysis and solutions to address the growing trend of violent student protests, which could negatively affect the university's operations and stability. This study seeks to contribute to understanding and mitigating such challenges.

This study employs Altbach's Theory of Student Activism, refined by Luescher (2018), to explore the dynamics of student activism. The theory identifies ten propositions, emphasizing factors such as the role of higher education, student agency, political legitimacy, and institutional responses in shaping activism. Central to these propositions is the understanding that activism is a multi-stakeholder phenomenon influenced by institutional characteristics, ideological differences, and external socio-political conditions. The framework highlights the need for collaboration, inclusivity, and legitimate governance mechanisms to address the root causes of activism effectively. The study focuses on three key propositions: *Higher Education Matters,*

Student Agency Matters, and Response Matters. These propositions underscore the critical role of academic institutions in fostering activism, particularly through their structural realities, ideological environments, and the platforms they provide for student mobilization. Institutions like Makerere University, with a more diverse and smaller student body, are noted to have a heightened potential for impactful activism. The propositions also highlight the role of student organizations in mobilizing and advocating for change, while noting that poorly managed responses to activism, such as violent crackdowns, can exacerbate conflicts. Altbach's theory further emphasizes the interplay between student movements and external stakeholders, including the media, government, and broader society. Effective activism relies on the alignment of student grievances with public interests and the dissemination of their message through strategic means. Violent responses, as seen at Makerere University, often escalate conflicts and lead to detrimental outcomes. The study's focus on Propositions 3, 8, and 10 offers a deeper understanding of the structural, organizational, and response-related factors influencing student activism, providing practical insights for fostering constructive dialogue and mitigating tensions in academic institutions.

This study conceptualized student activism by focusing on its nature, causes, and management. These elements were selected due to their relevance to Albatch's Theory of Student Activism, which forms the theoretical foundation of the research. According to Burket and Luescher (2018), student activism represents the collective public expression of student ideas aimed at fostering politically relevant debates and driving moderate, radical, or revolutionary socio-cultural and political changes. Similarly, Garwe (2017) describes student activism as the involvement of individuals in group efforts to defend their interests and influence systems, policies, attitudes, and behaviors affecting university life and broader society. Luescher (2015) expands on this by categorizing activism as either extraordinary political engagement or informal initiatives that introduce new ideas or shape public debate. In this study, student activism is specifically defined through its nature, causes, and management, with an

emphasis on how these dimensions determine whether activism remains peaceful or escalates into violence. The research at Makerere University examined various forms of activism, including protests, demonstrations, petitions, letter-writing, coalition-building, social media campaigns, boycotts, and dialogue-based interventions. This exploration aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of student activism and its dynamics within the university context.

This study was conducted at Makerere University, one of Africa's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher learning, which has a longstanding history of student activism, both violent and non-violent. Kasozi (2015) highlights that Makerere University has experienced consistent waves of strikes, with nearly every year marked by student protests or the threat thereof. Between 2013 and 2022, Ainembabazi (2022) documented eight significant strikes, some of which led to the temporary closure of the university. Similarly, The New Vision (October 29, 2019) reported 21 cases of student strikes at Makerere University between 1990 and 2019, averaging at least one strike per year, with 2016 alone witnessing three major incidents. These strikes often stemmed from students expressing grievances on issues they believed directly impacted their welfare. Despite the guild constitution's commitment under Article 2 to promote and protect students' interests, this objective has frequently gone unmet. This failure is evident in the often-harsh responses by university management to student protests, which have intensified tensions and underscored the disconnect between student demands and institutional governance. This study was aimed at understanding the complexity of the causes of student activism at Makerere University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is guided by Altbach's Theory of Student Activism which was developed by Luescher (2018) based on the seminal work which was done by Altbach on student activism. According to Luescher (2018), Altbach's theory of student activism has ten propositions. The first proposition is basically on a multi-levelled conception of the student policy and a multi-stakeholder conception of politics. The second proposition is about political development and

legitimacy matters which must be carefully addressed. The third proposition is about higher education matters, where values and an academic life that ignores sensitive higher education matters provoke activism. The fourth proposition is concerned with institutional characteristics, especially the location and nature of students that may favour activism cases. The fifth proposition is about discipline or subject areas of specialization where the theory indicates that students doing social sciences are more likely to engage in activism cases.

The sixth proposition is about students' backgrounds and experiences, where students from minority groups are less likely to engage in strikes. This proposition has it that students from affluent families are likely to engage more in strikes. The seventh assumption is about ideological matters. It explains these differences in ideologies between students or youths and the ideologies of those in administrative positions. Proposition number eight is about the paramount importance of student agency. This assumption has it that student organizations and movements are the typical platforms from which student activism is collectively organized. The ninth proposition is that of conjuncture. This assumption spells out there are conditions at the micro-political level, micro, meso, and micro levels of higher education policy that provide both enabling and constraining conditions for student activism to emerge. Lastly, the theory adds that response matters, that is, external circumstances like media coverage, the response of social groups outside the university, and the response from government agencies determine the extent to which activism would occur or not occur.

The theory is applicable to the study as appointed by Kettunen (2015) that higher education provides services for those who study and research, students are therefore identified as core stakeholders and as customers of higher education services, characteristic of legitimacy, power, and urgency. The above components put students at the fore in influencing and partaking in matters concerning higher education. It should be taken a step further that stakeholder position ultimately brings about competitive advantages to the participating organization (Donald, 2019). The application of the

theory is challenged due to the multiple levels of authority and governance in the sector, the different groups that stake their claims to the governance in higher education and other formal and informal systems make applicability difficult. Hence the study explored the causes of student activism at Makerere University.

Causes of Student Activism at Makerere University

Garwe (2017) investigated the embracing of student activism as a quality assurance tool in higher education. His findings showed that student activism occurs at different levels depending on the composition of students' backgrounds of academic and non-academic staff, the inclusion of leadership issues in the curriculum, and the value students place on group work. However, this study was a Desktop Literature Review, while this current study will be empirical. Nonetheless,

Stuurman (2018) investigated student activism during a crisis in South Africa and established that the quest for black power was derived in some universities like Nelson Mandela University, which were highly responsible for increasing student activism in universities. However, this study was not specifically in the context of Makerere University, which is a center of focus in the current study.

Mugume and Luescher (2017) conducted a study on political parties and student leaders at Makerere University. Their interest was to find out the relationship between student leaders in Makerere University and the effect of this relationship on the ability leadership styles of student leaders. They used a mixed method quant-qual approach to research in which they carried out an online survey on 109 student leaders. In order to have a comprehensive analysis of the survey responses.

Tugume and Luescher (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with leaders of students, the dean of students at Makerere University, and the party representative in charge of students. Overall, their qualitative sample was twelve interviewees whom they were purposively selected. According to their findings, there was a close relationship between student leaders and national political parties with the ruling party being influential by the candidate of the Guild position. In their overall results, they found out that most of the student leaders at Makerere University were intensively attached to political parties. Such results suggested that the demands of students at Makerere University were conditioned by external politics. In their conclusion, they noted that the relationship between students' leaders and political parties can negatively affect the legitimacy of student representation in higher education policy-making. Accordingly, they proposed higher education institutions to investigate how best to enhance a positive relationship.

Van Tol (2017) investigated university student activism in order to explore some of the elements that could enable or constrain student activism and facilitate the students' opportunities to act on issues of their choice. He conducted his study in a regional university in Southeast Queensland where among others advancing human rights in a fair and equitable manner was emphasized. He used a mixed-method research approach in which he collected data from undergraduate students using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. He found out that the triangulation of results from the questionnaires and interview guides, the elements of group work, and time appeared to enable student activism when present and constrain it when absent. His findings also revealed that student activism cases were more individual-oriented issues on the side of students. The greater the students lacked self-efficacy the more they were likely to abandon activist cases whereas on the other side students with a high sense of self-efficacy were likely to engage in activism activities in situations of discontent. However, this study was not in the context of Makerere University, Uganda's universities study as will be the case with the current suggested study. Markovikj and Serafimovska (2018) analyzed the motive for social justice students' activism at the university level. They use a quantitative approach to research. Using regression analysis methods (quantitatively gathered data), results revealed that social injustice influences student activism. Some of these activism activities were identified as violent under the pretext of fighting for freedom. Smith et al. (2018) conducted a study aimed at understanding student activism by applying Altbach's theory which employed a qualitative approach to research. The study findings

revealed various factors influencing student activism, including social justice concerns, campus climate, and leadership opportunities. The key findings emphasized the importance of student agency, collective action, and engagement with social and political issues.

Tazwaire and Oketch (2022 carried out a study in which they sought to examine how the involvement of students could help to avoid the rampant student unrest in public universities in Uganda and Makerere in particular which experienced student unrest whenever there were changes in fees policy. They used a mixed method approach which implied that both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in data collection and analysis. Their sample size was 368 and this included students, student leaders, and university administrators. The questionnaires were answered by both students and student leaders while they interviewed university administrators as key informants. They analyzed their quantitative data using descriptive statistics and content analysis for qualitative data.

Tazwaire and Oketch (2022) found that a majority of students at Makerere University (93.7%) cited a lack of consultation on the fees policy as the primary cause of student unrest. In contrast, university administrators argued that students had avenues for input through committee representation. They recommended a reevaluation of public universities' engagement methods with students, noting current approaches were ineffective and warranting further exploration. Similarly, Leuscher and Turkoglu (2022) identified key drivers of student activism globally, including demands for equality, social justice, and political freedoms, while the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a deterrent to activism. However, they acknowledged that the nature of activism in Uganda, particularly at Makerere University, may differ, with issues like financial exclusion and the affordability of education being prominent concerns.

Orgeret and Namisinga (2020) highlighted the significant role of social media in activism, noting campaigns like "Pads for Girls" garnered widespread political attention in Uganda. Additionally, Tessema (2015) pointed out that socio-biographical factors, social belonging, and leadership roles contribute to the formation of activist consciousness, drawing on Philip Altbach's (1960) framework. Namaara and Kasaya (2016) similarly examined activism related to teachers' welfare, emphasizing poor working conditions as a catalyst for protest, while recognizing that student protests often align with broader societal grievances. Hlatshwayo and Fomunyam (2018) theorized that political restrictions and denial of students' freedoms often fuel unrest, especially in countries like South Africa. Etaneki and Okolie (2020) studied student unrest in Nigeria, finding that tuition fees, dissatisfaction with academic programs, and poor leadership were key factors. They suggested further studies in different contexts, acknowledging the limitations of generalizing their findings beyond Nigeria. Collectively, these studies highlight the complex, multifaceted nature of student activism, shaped by financial, political, and social dynamics.

Soltysiak (2020) studied social media's impact on college student's activism. With the use of qualitative data collection methods results revealed that social media platforms have greatly impacted students' engagement in activism. Through social media, students can remotely plan, organize, and execute their protests, demonstrations, or movements quicker than ever before. This has relatively led to new ideas of activism and the so-called Slakticism. Besides, this study will conceptually not consider mass media alone as an influencing factor on students' activism. Further, Nett (2023) studied disability in Uganda visage global influences, results revealed that activists seemed to be lacking awareness of current debates about unequal power relations and reflections on the assumed universality of concepts. This observation suggests a potential gap in understanding the broader global context and the complexities surrounding disability issues within Uganda's activist community.

Wahl and Falik (2023) outlined a model of student activism, identifying four stages; discontent, initiation, formalization, and public support - and three types of unrest: persuasive, resistant, and revolutionary. He attributed the causes of unrest to economic demands, policy changes, university system dysfunction, poor facilities, strained student-

administrator relationships, and external political influences. To address these issues, Falik recommended that university authorities listen to student concerns, avoid harsh responses, and regulate external political involvement in student affairs. Oyekanmi et al. (2023) examined the link between student activism and institutional governance in Nigerian universities, finding that poor leadership and misalignment between student expectations and institutional governance fueled unrest. Similarly, Tugume and Lueschi (2017) noted that political party influence was a key external factor in student activism at Makerere University. They highlighted a methodological gap, advocating for a phenomenological approach to better understand the causes of activism and its potential for violence by interviewing administrators and student leaders.

This review presents critical research gaps. Methodological gaps as studies like Garwe (2017) based on desktop literature review and others like Orgeret and Namisinga (2020) were based on mixed methods, a phenomenological study based on interviews of lived experiences of students and administrators about student activism may provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, some studies were contextually situated in the Western world like van Tol (2017), and others were regionally based like Luescher and Tukoglu (2022) and Stuurman (2018) in Southern Africa, Etaneki and Okolie (2020). In terms of the study population, most studies relied on student views rather than administrators, academic staff, and other external stakeholders. A temporal gap is evident in the review as most studies were in a pre-covid -19 pandemic period or during the times of the pandemic, like Garwe (2017), Smith et al. (2018), Tesema (2015), Markovik and Serafimovska (2018) and Etaneki and Okolie (2020), those studies present a strong ground for this study.

METHODOLOGY

This research views student activism as an essential reality in higher education, recognizing the individuality and unique contributions of students. It emphasizes the importance of empowering students through leadership development, fostering peaceful engagement, and promoting accountability and transparency. The study believes that student activism, through various methods such as protests and advocacy, can raise awareness, influence policy, and bring about lasting change. Ontologically, it supports intellectual freedom and open dialogue, resisting oppression and injustice that hinder freedom of expression (Wang, 2023). Epistemologically, the study values the free expression of students to promote creativity, and academic growth, and prevent marginalization (Kayyali, 2022). Methodologically, the research adopts an interpretive paradigm, focusing on understanding the subjective experiences of students through interviews to explore the nature and causes of student activism at Makerere University. The interpretive approach, grounded in Altbach's theory of student activism (Luescher, 2018), allows for a deeper understanding of the realities students face within the university context and aims to amplify their voices for positive change.

Research Design

Drawing on a phenomenological research design, the study focused on the causes of student activism at Makerere University. This research design was used because it focused on understanding the subjective experiences and meanings of student activists, providing an in-depth exploration of their perspectives as they shared with me their experiences. This research style was also used because it enabled me to capture the complexity, ambiguity, and chaos of student activism, revealing the multiple perspectives and experiences involved and allowing for a detailed understanding of the complexities and dynamics involved. It critically accessed some students' and administrators' voices to construct meaning on the nature, causes, and management of student activism at Makerere University. Participants were interviewed and provided a considerable reach amount of data for the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study Population

This study targeted a population of 65 college administrators and 265 student guild council members, as outlined in the Guild Constitution (2023). The administrators were drawn from key positions such as college principals, deputy

principals, registrars, deans, departmental heads, and hall wardens, while student leaders were selected from the College of Veterinary, Animal and Bio Science (CoVABS), College of Health Science (CoHS), College of Humanities and Social Science (CHUSS), and College of Education and External Studies (CEES). These participants were chosen due to their direct involvement with students, making them relevant for addressing the research problem (Castel & Bries, 2021). The sample size was 14 participants. These consisted of eight student leaders (two from each college, with one male and one female per college) and six administrators, aligning with Biglan's (1973) academic discipline classification. Data saturation determined the sample size, with no new information emerging after data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Gender balance was maintained by ensuring each college had one male and one female student leader, while the administrators included three hall wardens, one former dean, and two deans of students.

Sampling techniques

The study employed nonprobability sampling techniques which used purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The study recruited participants purposively because they hard diverse experiences of the phenomenon understudy in selecting the participants. The purposive sampling technique is one in which participants are selected because of the specific knowledge they possess in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (Sanderas, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). The study used a snowball technique when selecting participants who were introduced because of their relevance to the topic under investigation. Snowball, chain sampling, or network sampling is a non-probability sampling method of study where study participants are recruited within their sphere of influence (Sharma, 2017).

Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews provided a valuable opportunity for participants to share their experiences and emotions regarding student activism, offering insights into their social realities through personal stories, body language, and emotions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interviews, conducted in a conversational format, built trust and allowed for the use of probing techniques to gather rich data. However, challenges arose due to time constraints and logistical issues with scheduling, as well as changes in interview dates and locations by administrators, which affected the budget. Despite these challenges, the benefits of face-to-face interviews outweighed the limitations. Additionally, a documentary review highlighted systemic governance issues at Makerere University, such as the imposition of unpopular policies without meaningful student engagement, including the mandatory 60% tuition payment before registration and the 2022 guild election statute mandating virtual elections. These policies, which restricted physical campaigns and limited student gatherings, exacerbated discontent and undermined student participation and democratic governance. The lack of student involvement in key decisions, such as the fees policy under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001, amended 2006), fostered a climate of dissatisfaction. The review also noted the 2016 closure of Makerere University by presidential directive as a manifestation of the suppression of student voices, reflecting broader governance challenges. It underscored that unresolved grievances and neglect of student perspectives perpetuated activism and unrest, highlighting the urgent need for reforms to promote participatory governance and address the root causes of student dissatisfaction.

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected by use of interview guides and documentary checklists which enabled to obtain information relevant to student activism at Makerere University. Information was obtained from student leaders and administrators who were directly involved in student activities and decision-making processes. Interview guides were used to obtain student leaders' information about the causes of student activism at Makerere University. Documentary checklists were also used. The following documents were examined: Student Guild Constitution 2022, Makerere Student Guild Statute 2022, Student Power in African Higher Education: a case of Makerere University by Fredrick Kamuhanda (2020), Uganda National Council of

Higher Education reports, Annual Vice Chancellor's reports and newspaper reports from 2010-2024.

Quality Control

The study adhered to the principle of trustworthiness to ensure data accuracy and reliability by focusing on dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Dependability was achieved by re-evaluating data multiple times and comparing interview findings with earlier conversations, ensuring detailed reporting for future replication. Confirmability involved minimizing personal biases and deriving interpretations directly from participants' voices while gathering diverse perspectives. Credibility was maintained by ensuring participants fully understood questions, confirming the authenticity of recorded responses, and avoiding fabrication (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Lastly, transferability was addressed by providing detailed reporting to enable comprehension and application in similar research contexts, although the specificity of qualitative findings to particular environments can limit generalizability.

Data Analysis

The study went through four stages of data analysis. In the first stage, it transcribed all the data in the form of the voices which was obtained from the participants based on each of the objectives of the study. In doing this, it was supported by the recorded voices to supplement what was gotten from the note book. In the second stage which was to improve on the accuracy of the data and clarify any misunderstanding or misinterpretation, a member checked by taking the transcribed data back to the participants for confirmation. In the third stage of data analysis, coding the data from which it came up with four sub-themes for each objective (Braun & Clarke, 2017). In the fourth stage of data analysis, the researcher developed a theme for each objective from the four sub-themes, and from these themes, interpreted the data.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to this study to ensure the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the research process. The principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were rigorously adhered to throughout. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their freedom to partake or withdraw without coercion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Confidentiality was maintained by securely storing all information and limiting its use to academic purposes only. Anonymity was upheld through the use of pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. Furthermore, participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without facing any consequences, fostering a respectful and ethical research environment.

Description of participants' background information

First is obtaining the background information of the participants who were students' leaders and administrators at Makerere University in order to understand their characteristics in relation to the study. Choosing the informants purposively as they were best suited to avail relevant information pertaining to the causes of student activism at Makerere University. Data was collected from fourteen participants including eight student leaders and six administrators in Makerere University. Data was collected from four out of ten colleges of Makerere University with two participants from each of the colleges of whom one was a female (F) and the other was a male (M). Therefore a total of four females and four males from the students' representative gave a balance in gender among these participants. Respectively initialized the female and male students' leaders from (CoNAS) as FST/1 and MST/2. Respectively initialized the female and male students' leaders from CoHS, as FST/3 and MST/4. Also, initialized the female and male students' leaders from CHUSS as FST/5 and MST/6. Lastly, initializing the female and male students' leaders from CEES as FST/7 and MST/8. Also established that FST/3 held a high position on the guild council, MST/4 was a college representative, FST/5 was a former guild president, MST/6 was a former school representative and FST/7 was a former vice guild president. This means that the informants in the category of students' representatives were in a position to provide sufficient information on the

causes of student activism at Makerere University. Among the administrators two were deans from two colleges, one was an administrator from the Dean of Students office and the other three were wardens in three of the halls of residence at Makerere University. The study respectively initialized these informants as ADM/1, ADM/2, ADM/3, AdM/4, ADM/5 and ADM/6.

RESULTS

The results showed that the causes of student activism at Makerere University were complex and many ranging from internal politics, effects of national politics, delayed or inability to attend to student welfare adequately, the need to seek justice for marginalized groups, and issues related to neo-liberalised governance of public universities. Interactions with the participants mainly student leaders on how national politics influences internal politics, the type of social problems that activism tends to solve, whether they were able to address the causes of the problems they faced, their opinion on the academic discontent, their opinion on the resource allocation to the guild, why students would keep away from leadership positions and their reactions when student election results were mismanaged.

In the interaction with the participants on how national politics influenced internal politics, two of the participants (FST/3, MST/4and MST/8) reported that there was a tendency of candidates in the university to get support from external national political parties hence influencing their success. For example, MST/8 revealed that:

> Makerere University being a public university, much of what happens in the internal politics is largely influenced by external politics. For example, a number of candidates within the university tend to represent external parties at the national level. These go ahead to receive support from external political parties.

In addition, FST/3 mentioned that:

> National politics strongly influences internal politics. That is why you will find NRM, DP, NUP, and other parties sponsoring candidates for guild presidency because they know how

> important it is to win an election at an institutional level.

From the same interaction (on how external politics influenced internal politics), two of the participants (MST/2 and MST/6) expressed the view that Makerere University was seen as a breeding ground for national politics. As a result, external parties came in always to support future leaders in national politics leading to unnecessary student protests on campus. In particular, MST/2) reported that:

> Of course, national political parties want to groom young leaders. So, they have to come to these institutions to spot, potential political leaders to whom they even give financial support during the campaigns whereby makes them get more heated up.

In the same interaction, one of the participants (FST/7) was of the view that the influence was a two-way process whereby both internal and external politics influenced each other. She noted that:

> It is a two-way process in that involvement in national politics affects internal politics and internal politics also affects national politics. For the first one, most people who have positions outside are most likely to take up positions even here internally. So people who are already outside and have positions are most likely to join the internal politics here at Makerere University. Such people usually have national political barking.

However, one of the participants (FST/5) revealed that students' involvement in external politics had no influence on internal politics. She explained that Makerere University had its own politics with no connection with external politics. On this note, FST/5 submitted that:

> Nowadays, Makerere University has its own politics. You find that we have our own political parties like the "Bakoto', "the New Kids'', 'Sisiwenyewe'' and others. So, when you come from outside, you may not actually associate any party with the national parties.

When interacting with participants on the type of social problems that caused anguish among students that student leaders tended to solve, three of the

participants (FST/1, MST/6, FST/7, and MST/8) tended to suggest that student activism was aimed at ensuring that the welfare of students while at campus was good. On this aspect, MST/8 said that:

> Very often we as students' leaders focus on the welfare of students. We ensure that all students have the right to get all the social services such as a clean environment, and availability of electricity and water. We also ensure that students are able to get medical services through the university hospital.

From the same interaction, two of the participants (MST/2 and MST/8) pointed to the diversity of religious beliefs of students at Makerere University where students needed to enjoy their rights causing a form of social justice activism while on campus. Specifically, MST/2 reported that:

> Here within the university, we have students with many different religious beliefs and backgrounds. For example, we have the Muslim community who need to have a mosque, the Christians and born again who need to have well-gazetted places for prayers, and so on. These people also have special days for prayers which need to be respected. For example, the Seventh Day Adventists go for prayers on Saturday and therefore this day should be observed with no lectures fixed. So it is through student activism that the rights of students on this aspect are protected.

Still from the same interaction, one of the participants (FST/3) revealed that humanitarian or service-based student activism focused on social issues such as creating awareness of HIV and the effects of drug abuse since students at the university were still young people who needed some guidance on these issues. On this FST/3 mentioned that:

> Some of the social issues addressed by student activism include trying to mitigate HIV/AIDS among students through awareness since some of them are young girls and boys who still need guidance. The issue of Drug abuse is also encompassed. We do these through our health camps as part of the guild activities.

However, on the same issue (the social problems that student activism tended to solve) one of the participants (MST/4) revealed that student activism at Makerere University could not achieve much since management had the power to do whatever they wanted without consulting students or listening to their views. He noted that:

> There is no much that student activism can achieve. This is because students' views are partially attended to and in most cases neglected. As I said politics here is a dirty game. So, the administration wants only people it can control

In the interview with the respondents regarding whether the management addressed the causes of the problems affecting them on campus, three participants (MST/2, FST/3, MST/4, FST/7, and MST/8) suggested that they were unable to address these issues. They provided reasons indicating that the administration was sometimes reluctant, delaying listening to their grievances, which limited any meaningful progress, Specifically, MST/4 revealed that:

> We have no opportunity to address the causes of the problems that affect us here because whenever we engage the university management in such a discussion, they insist on whatever decision they have made. They are never interested in taking up our ideas. This explains why the same problems recur in many situations.

In addition, FST/7 reported that:

> We have made efforts to address these problems but it is just a waste of time sine whenever we as leaders talk about the cause of certain problems, management does not accept it. So the causes usually remain unaddressed and we see the same things happening again and again.

From the same interaction, one of the participants (FST/5) revealed that it was all dependent on the magnitude and nature of the problem to be addressed by university management. She said that:

> It depends on the magnitude of the problem at hand and how it has come about. So I can say that some problems we are able to address the cause but for some others were are unable. For

example, if it is about missing marks, usually the cause for that can easily be identified and addressed. But others such as the closure of small businesses at the university or increasing tuition it is very hard to address the cause.

From the same interaction however, two of the participants: (FST/1 and MST/6) mentioned that they were not interested in addressing the causes of the problems that affected them but rather in defending the students against any unfairness. For example, MST/6 mentioned that:

We do not need to address the cause of the problem because we are not the causers. The causers of the problem is the university administrators. So, they need to go and look for the cause of the problem. Ours as leaders is to respond to their favourable decisions either peacefully or forcefully.

In the interview with participants on their opinion on academic discontent, all the responses from five of the participants (MST/2 FST/3, MST/4, FST/5, FST/7, and MST/8) were indicative that students did not have much discontent stemming from the management of academic issues within the university. For example, MST/2 revealed that:

We do not have much discontent with the academic issues. Makerere University has tried to address the academic issues of students' right from teaching to issuing academic transcripts. This is reflected in the ranking of universities, especially in Africa where the university is always in a good position.

In the same line, MST/4 reported that:

There are a few cases of missing marks but in all a lot of efforts have been made to address the academic issues of students. So, on that side, we are for sure contented. Our lecturers do attend to us and they work in a professional way.

In line with this opinion, FST/3 said that:

Our university really tries so hard to deliver in terms of academic services, and I can say that they are doing their very best. Cases of missing marks have reduced since most of the systems

have been computerized and we can see things much better.

However, two of the participants (FST/1 and MST/6) reported that they were still faced with challenges in some academic issues at Makerere University where they were discontented and hence needed to be addressed. For example, FST/1 gave the opinion that:

Sometimes the resources for practicals are few or they are not brought in time. We have always received responses from the administration that the money for practicals has not been disbursed. Sometimes we do not have adequate internet connectivity across our various colleges and data is usually expensive for many of the students. Sometime you may need close to 6000 if you are to have an online lecture. But some students cannot afford that tune.

In addition to this view, MST/6 noted that:

Much as there is an improvement, we haven't actually taken up the 21st-century educational attributes. For example, the online learning we are talking about which Makerere University has embraced has a lot that is still left to be desired. Well, we do not dispute the fact that e-learning is in place, but needs improvement.

When interviewing participants on their opinion towards the resource allocation to the guild, six of the participants (FST/1, MST/2, MST/4, FST/5, MST/6, and FST/7) suggested that the funding was not enough to cater for the guild activities and at the same time the process of access the money was hard to go through. For example, MST/2 revealed that:

What is allocated to the guild is not as such sufficient to cater to all the guild activities. But to make matters worse, even the management of these resources within the guild itself is not good enough. So these are two key challenges that need to be solved.

In the same line, MST/6 noted that:

What is allocated to us as a guild is not enough yet we have a number of activities to run under our department as a guild. There is also a rigid system of requisitioning for this money and the

administration is ever saying that there is no money.

Related to this response MST/4 also reported that: "Student leadership mainly faced with financial challenges which tend to limit their ability to execute their obligations". For example, the university management sometimes fails to host sports galas or hold health camps as part of the student wellness programs." However, FST/3 reported that the university had made efforts to provide what was enough for the students' guild to carry out its activities. She noted that:

When it comes to finances, the university management really tries to facilitate the Guild. Our budget allocation is around '150 to 175 million' and this caters to about 18 members of the Guild and at least 100 GRC members to carry out their activities.

In addition, MST/8 submitted that:

That would be enough but there is misappropriation or misuse of funds within the guild itself. This is a serious issue. I think that is the reason why guild positions are highly contested. When one becomes a guild president, s/he tends to lead expensive life styles and end up misusing the funds.

In the interaction with participants, on why students kept away from leadership positions as an indication of student apathy to student politics and exclusion as a potent for disgruntled members to be involved in demonstrations, six of the participants (FST/1, MST/2, MST/4, FST/5, MST/6 and FST/7) tended to suggest that students' fears of the risk of being punished or malice by management in the event of disagreements. On this aspect, MST/6 reported that:

As students' leaders, we face a lot of persecution whereby many of us are always singled out and innocently punished. The moment you try to oppose what management has decided at any one point, you risk being taken in prison or even given retakes, not because you're dull, but because it is part of their ways of fighting you and fighting the student activism.

In relation to this report, FST/5 made an addition that:

The number one challenge with student leadership is that finally, you become the only white chicken who is always hunted. That comes about with many things. For example, we have seen people here who fail to graduate in time because they involve themselves in activism. One year we saw four guild presidents graduate at the same time having missed to graduate due to leadership issues. They were technically made not graduate because they wanted to demoralize them.

From the same interaction, two of the participants (FST/1 and MST/2) reported that it was due to financial reasons that some of the students could not take on leadership positions. For example, MST/2 commented that: "Some students fear to join university politics because they lack financial resources and feel insecure." In the same interaction, two of the participants (MST/2 and FST/7) tended to suggest that students were unable to take on leadership positions because of the hard tasks of being a leader that would affect their studies. Particularly FST/7 reported that: "Leadership is not a walk over. There is a lot of sacrifice that one has to make. Sometimes you miss lectures, and even take the risk of performing poorly in your academics." In the same interaction, one of the participants (FST/3) revealed that students failed to take on leadership positions because they felt they would have no power to make decisions on crucial matters which would make them weak leaders. On this issue, FST/3 said that:

Student leaders have limited powers, especially with the review of the constitution and this raises a big challenge in leadership. If leaders do not have power; then, they cannot make meaningful decisions because they feel like their voices will not be heard and they cannot have much influence. Some of the posts on the guild council are ceremonial without the utmost power to have influence on crucial matters.

On the same issue, one of the participants (MST/8) tended to suggest that the university had no programs of mentorship or exposure which led to risks for university leadership. On this issue, MST/8 game a report that:

There is a lack of mentorship capacity or exposure. This makes leaders unable to maneuver through the complexities of university leadership issues. Sometimes this ignorance or a lack of exposure can be a cause for unwanted strikes.

The researcher interviewed participants on their reactions when the election results within the university were mismanaged. In their responses, four of the participants (FST/1, FST/3, FST/5, and FST/7) tended to suggest that they would not do anything apart from just letting things go on. These explained that whichever step is taken, there would be nothing to change and it would be a waste of time. Specifically, FST/1 reported that:

When the electoral process has been unfair or mismanaged, personally I would not react because from what I have seen, even if you react, there is nothing that will be done. I would rather not react, because nothing will change. Why should I waste my time anyway?

In addition to this opinion, FST/3 noted that:

With the current situation of politics at Makerere University, there is nothing that one can do if such happens. After all, elections are online and to make matters worse physical campaigns were banned such that there is no basis for complaining when you are not satisfied. You have no evidence to claim that you had a large number of supporters before the elections.

Close to this view was the report by FST/5 that:

For all the time we have gone to online elections, students have not been convinced by the results. But at the moment there is no much one can do. After all, even the campaigns are no longer physical and in case you are found moving with more than 15 supporters during the campaign you are disqualified.

In a related submission, FST/7 said that:

There is nothing much one can do because all the unfairness and rigging in the electoral process is usually a coordinated involvement of the administration. So, it is simply a waste of

time to make an appeal, a petition, or a resistance. Once it happens you forget and do other things.

In this interaction however, two of the participants (MST/6 and FST/8) were suggestive that in case the result was mismanaged, they would go through the petition process and in case this failed, they would automatically opt for demonstrations either peacefully or forcefully. On this issue, MST/8 particularly reported that:

Where we have dissatisfaction in the electoral process, first, we attempt to petition dialogue, two petitions but nothing is achieved, we front candidates that are not known to the administration. By doing this we are protesting against the decision made by the electoral Commission.

Analysis of data on the Causes of Student Activism at Makerere University.

Internal politics

Most of the participants (FST/1, MST/2, FST/3, MST/4, FST/7, and MST/8) made reference to the influence of national politics on the internal politics of Makerere University. These emphasized that there was external funding and support for the internal politics at Makerere University. They shared with me that there was a direct influence of external politics on internal politics since the candidates in internal politics had attachments with the national political parties. As a result, national parties ended up sponsoring candidates for sensitive positions, especially the guild presidency. They admitted that the national political party to which one belonged was a key determinant of his/her success in internal politics. Accordingly, MST/8 reported that:

Makerere being a public university, much of what happens in internal politics is largely dependent on external politics. For example, a number of candidates within the university usually represent external parties at the national level. These go ahead to receive support from the external national political parties. In doing this, national parties are identifying Makerere University as a bleeding ground for future politicians.

In supplement to this submission, MST/1 revealed that a good number of students who participated in internal politics were already in national politics which made it easy for them to succeed in internal politics. MST/1 particularly mentioned that:

It is very common that most of the students who are involved in internal politics also participate in national politics. Such students always drive internal politics under the influence of external politics. For instance, they wish to see ideas from outside such as opposition to policies and decisions from management being brought into the politics of Makerere University. When such people reach here, they find it easy to win the elections since they always receive external funding and support and they then find opportunities to influence the internal politics.

Based on these submissions, it can be observed that external politics to a large extent influenced internal politics with most of the candidates attached to the national politics being supported externally.

Inertia

Pertaining to whether student activism addressed the cause of the problem, most of the participants (MST/2, FST/3, MST/4, FST/7, and MST/8) asserted that it was hard for that to be achieved since they could not have that opportunity. These explained to me that the possible avenues such as negotiations to address the causes of the problem were not available since management was not interested in listening to their opinions. They further informed that management was never ready to reverse whatever they would have decided upon. In particular,

MST/3 commented that:

This is very hard if am to be honest with you. For sure we cannot address the cause of the problems because whenever we demand a change in anything where we are dissatisfied it is very hard for management to reverse the decision. Management ever sticks to what they have decided no matter the effect it has on us. Neither are they interested in getting any adverse from us. Yes, we may be represented on some organs with the management structure, but

still, we cannot do much because our number of such organs is very small. So, if a policy is passed and we complain the best that can be done is only to reverse the ongoing students but effect it on the new entrants. This explains why similar situations keep on recurring.

In addition to this view, MST/4 confirmed that:

We do not have any opportunity to address the cause of the problems because whenever we engage the university management in such discussions, they insist on whatever decision they have made. They are never interested in taking up our ideas once they come up with their resolutions. This is a sign that we have no room to participate in any decision-making. So, all our efforts to address the cause of the problems. This explains why the same problems recur in many situations and hence having endless strikes at Makerere University.

In summary, these findings suggested that students' activism was not in a position to address the causes of the problems that were affecting the students. This according to the participants explained why similar problems would recur.

Proficiency

Regarding the opinion that academic discontent as a possible cause of student protests and activism, the majority of the participants (MST/2, FST/3, MST/4, FST/5, FST/7, and MST/8) asserted that they were contented with the academic services which they were receiving. They explained that lecturers had attended to them and they were doing the teaching in a professional way. They gave a reason that it was due to the good academic services that Makerere University had been ranked among the top universities in Uganda and Africa.

We do not have any discontent with the academic issues. We appreciate the fact that Makerere University has tried to address most of the academic issues of students' right from teaching to issuing academic transcripts. Recently, Makerere has managed to give out transcripts to students on the very day of graduation. Most of the systems have been computerized to improve the efficiency of the

services such as recording of marks. Such improvement in academic issues is reflected in the ranking of universities, especially in Africa where university always features among the best.

This view was similarly echoed by FST/7 who added:

Makerere University is really doing well in terms of academics. As of now, we do not have any academic discontent since there has been great improvement in that area. There is a lot of computerization of marks recording that the issue of missing marks has reduced and transcripts are given out on the day of graduation. There is good teaching and assessment and the quality is good. At least Makerere University is one of the leading universities here in Uganda and in Africa generally.

In brief, according to these findings, it can be concluded that students did not have discontentment with the academic issues currently as in the early days of the 1990s and 2000s.

Impasse

Pertaining to the reaction of students when the election results are mishandled, participants (FST/1, MST/2, FST/3, MST/ 4, FST/5, MST/6, and FST/7) confirmed that nothing could be done since that would be just a waste of time. During the interaction with these participants, it was learned that most of the attempts to petition the electoral process had not yielded any positive results to the petitioners and therefore they had resorted to just keeping quiet and moving on with other things in the event that such happened. Also, it was learned that with the new online campaigns, the election's physical campaigns had been burnt and hence the basis for raising complaints had been reduced.

I do not think that there is much one can do when the results are mishandled. Nothing at all and it would just be a waste of time. The current politics at Makerere University is very dirty that, there is nothing one can do if such happened. After all, elections are online and to make matters, worse physical campaigns were burnt

such that there was no basis for complaining. If you are found with more than five supporters during campaigns you are disqualified. You have no evidence to claim that you had a large number of supporters.

Adding to this view, MST/4 said that:

With online elections that have been adopted at Makerere University, it is impossible to do anything in case you are not satisfied with the electoral results. For example, recently we had online elections and students were not satisfied with the results. These petitioned the electoral commission but did not get anything positive. So, in my opinion, if such happens, there is nothing one can do. Just keep quiet and do other things. Otherwise, it is just a waste of time.

Considering the above arguments, it was clear that when the election results were mishandled, the students had no freedom to seek justice. It can also be learnt that the current online elections were in one way or the other negatively affecting the electoral process and that students were often not satisfied with the results.

Data Interpretation

Stalement

The four subthemes of the objective of explaining the causes of student activism were interdependent politics, inertia, proficiency, and impasse. From the relationships, among these sub-themes, a theme came up which was "stalement." This theme suggested that a combination of the subthemes leads to conditions that affected or paralyzed students' lives on campus hence leading to student activism. For example, internal politics was influenced by power struggles among different stakeholders (internal and external) which affected the process of decision-making. It can be learned that the interaction and influence of these stakeholders were largely responsible for shaping the internal politics in the university and hence student activism. Inertia in this regard suggested that there was a reluctance by management to open doors for opinions from students as they laboured to pursue their needs which resulted in student activism. In other words, there was resistance from management at Makerere

University to embed the opinions of students into their decisions.

The component of proficiency indicated that management lacked concern over the issues that were affecting students which led to student activism. In my interaction with the participants, It can be noted that sometimes it was common for management at Makerere University to take for granted issues that needed urgent attention yet they were affecting the students. The component of the impasse in regard to this objective and hence theme (stalement) was showing that students experienced a tendency to be blocked from expressing their dissatisfaction which also potentially led to student activism. In other words, although students made attempts to raise issues that affected them, university management lacked the will to engage with them. In summary, a combination of these components of "stalement" and the interplay between them describes the causes of student activism at Makerere University.

DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Aligned with the goal of understanding the causes of student activism, research consistently highlights university management's reluctance to incorporate student input as a key factor. Masungo (2024) highlighted that university administrations in Zimbabwe, much like those at Makerere, were often slow to respond to students' grievances, fostering a climate of dissatisfaction that ultimately led to demonstrations. Such inertia is frequently compounded by a lack of concern from management about student welfare, as found in this study. Research by Ainomugisha et al (2024) and Luscher-Maschela and Turkungulu (2024) similarly illustrated that student activism arises when institutions neglect urgent student concerns, viewing them as minor or inconsequential. In Makerere's case, management's failure to engage with students' needs directly contributed to escalating activism.

The concept of impasse also emerged as a significant cause of student activism. When students are systematically blocked from voicing their concerns, activism becomes a necessary outlet for dissent. This resonates with findings by Masungo (2024), who studied student activism in South Africa and noted that when students perceive that their voices are silenced, they resort to protest as a means of political expression and forcing institutional change. Similarly, the lack of consultation with students on policies such as the fee structure at Makerere University echoes broader patterns observed in African universities, where student governance often remains a symbolic gesture rather than a genuine avenue for dialogue (Tazwaire & Oketch, 2022).

The authoritarian management framework observed in Makerere, where activism is met with a rigid structure involving advocacy, governance, orientation, and repression, highlights a typical response to student activism in many African universities. This pattern mirrors the findings of Oyekanmi et al (2023), who discussed how authoritarian regimes in universities across the continent view student protests as threats to institutional stability, often resulting in repression rather than negotiation. This repression often reinforces the power imbalance between university management and students, fostering an environment where activism is seen as the only recourse for students seeking change. Therefore, the study's findings on the causes of student activism at Makerere University are well-supported by existing literature. The interplay of external political influence, internal university inertia, a lack of engagement with student concerns, and institutional repression provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of student activism, not only in Makerere but also in universities globally.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study indicated that there was a combination of factors that accounted for the causes of student activism and these were interdependent politics, inertia, proficiency, and impasses. These factors collectively described a theme as 'stalement' where students' efforts to advance their issues tended to hit a deadlock was faced with challenging situations that hindered progress. The interdependent politics led to power struggle among different stakeholders while inertia meant that management resisted change pushed by students. Proficiency caused stagnation and impasses slowed down decision-making on matters affecting students at the university. These barriers created a sense of

students being blocked from raising their issues and achieving their goals hence leading to student activism.

Recommendations

The article emphasizes the need for collaboration between student activists and administrators at Makerere University to enhance the quality of education. It recommends that student leaders receive leadership training based on the guild constitution to improve their ability to advocate for students' rights without conflict. On the administrative side, it suggests timely accountability, proactive engagement with students, and efforts to better understand the goals of activists. The article advocates for a shift from an authoritarian to a more democratic management style, promoting flexibility in decision-making and involving students in policies such as school fees and exams. It also calls for better training for staff handling student affairs to manage activism constructively and avoid excessive force during conflicts.

Contributions of the Study

This study made a contribution to the body of knowledge and to the implementation of policies as well as management styles in higher education. Theoretically, the study upholds three main assumptions of Altbach's Theory of student activism rather than other assumptions for causing student activism at Makerere University. In terms of contributing to the body of knowledge, the study reviewed literature from the previous studies from which efforts were made to address issues hence making a contribution to the existing literature. In the same line, while related studies have been done here at Makerere University, the literature remains rather scanty in particular on how to understand the causes and management of student activism. This study was therefore a contribution towards that contextual gap. In terms of policy implementation and management of student activism, the study findings will help Makerere University and other institutions of higher learning to strategize their efforts on how to manage student activism. These findings will be essential in the process of not only

making policies that affect students but also when evaluating them.

Area for Further Research

Because of the importance that student activism can yield, there is a need for further research on administrators' and activists' approaches to handling student activism. Secondly, researchers may undertake a comparative study on student activism in higher education institutions in developed and developing countries. Exploring the positive and negative technological role in student activism or research to be carried out through a mixed method approach targeting a larger population and bigger sample in Makerere University. There is a need to investigate the impact of bad and good activism on the nation's social, political, and economic advancement or examine alumni influence and involvement in student activism at Makerere University using longitudinal methods.

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