

STUDENTS' ACTIVISM AND INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Abdullahi Abiodun Oyekanmi¹

Adeola Aderayo Adebajo²

Afeez Kolawole Shittu³

^{1&2}Department of Political Science,

Tai Solarin University of Education

Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria

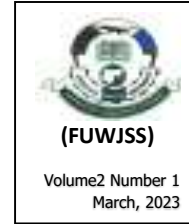
oyekanmiabdullahi655@gmail.com

adebajoaa@tasued.edu.ng

³Department of Political Science,

Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Nigeria

shittu.afeez2450@fcesoyo.edu.ng



Abstract

Students' activism and protests have assumed a global dimension due to varying challenges in educational governance within larger political strata of nation-states. This paper interrogates the relationship between students' activism and institutional governance in Nigerian universities, attempting to explain how this relationship reinforces academic excellence and effective leadership in Nigerian Universities. The study relied on a systematic review of secondary data. The study adopted critical mass theory as its theoretical framework. The study's findings iterate that students' activism and protests are products of higher institutional failure and poor leadership within Nigerian Universities. The paper concludes that as long as there is a disconnection between students' expectations on education and institutional governance, there would always be tension and conflict within the Nigerian University system. Thus, the study recommends for the reconfiguration of students' affairs units of all tertiary institutions with individuals who are more receptive to students' psychology, empathy and clear understanding of important nuances around students' movements, needs and priorities. Also, having past students' union leaders as Dean and Students' Affairs Officers will reinforce students' trust in the tertiary institutions management and offer brightest opportunities to nip any crisis at the bud.

Keywords: Activism, higher institution, unionism, students protest, students' affairs

Introduction

Globally, the establishment of higher institutions of learning is premised on the need to produce intellectually sound graduates, morally responsible

citizens and capable individuals who are equally expected to improve the society through wealth of knowledge, acquired skills and cooperative interpersonal relationships. These important responsibilities were corroborated by Chiamogu (2018) that higher institutions of learning must train students as promoter of national development. Thus, it is the students' exposure to civic duties, development driven obligations and as instruments of social change within and outside the university system that have branded them as important stakeholders in the realm of university administration and equally as watch-dog on the larger political spectrums in the society. As noted by Oyekanmi (2020) the need for students to live up to her dichotomous functions, protect their rights to improved welfare and education, including stimulation of good governance in the society influenced the formation of students' unions across campuses with different leadership structures. These activities, operational clandestine and engagement patterns by the students' activists in relationship with the leadership of higher institutions of learning, the government and the society that have strengthened the rubric of students' activism worldwide. Luescher (2018) opined that modern students' activism is likened to responses against educational, economic and political challenges in the metropolitan universities through uprising and protests in Europe and developing countries. Oyekanmi (2014) argued that globally, protest is a popular weapon by students to press home their demands on matters of education and governance issues. He was unequivocal that students' numerical advantage has become the usual leverage to get the needed attention from the management of higher institutions of learning and government against tuition increment, poor learning environment and unpopular government policy with possible hardship effect on the populace. Very significantly, students' protest is a popular syndrome in the third world countries where there are disarticulated relationship between students' leadership and school management with attendance governance crisis and underdevelopment (Oyekanmi, 2020; Mimiko, 2017).

Olugbade (1990) was critical about the use of protests by Nigerian students in the era of military interregnum before Nigeria's Fourth Republic under the leadership of National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) which later metamorphosed to the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). In Nigeria, there have been many organized students protests, public demonstration and mass action against students' intimidation and harsh economic policies. Some of the curated protests are "Ali Must Go" public demonstration in 1978, the "Ango Abdullahi" Must Go 1986 in Ahmadu Bello University, "Anti SAP" removal of oil subsidy riots in 1990 and 2011 including the annulment of June 12, 1993. The aftermath of many of these protests have led to destruction of lives and properties even when

the protest achieved some of its objectives. Unfortunately, students' protests and consequent destructions on and outside campuses have been growing unabated, despite the presence of key stakeholders such as dean of students' Affairs and other related offices who are expected to use their experiences to guide students' leadership on peaceful modus operandi that will not compromise stable academic calendar and peaceful society. More often than not, many students' activists are now misconstrued as thugs and miscreants, while at the mention of students' unionism, violence and destruction strike fears into the minds of the public. The focus of this paper is to examine the role of students' activism in influencing institutional governance within higher Nigerian universities, identifying the causes and impact of students' activism on the governance structures of their universities.

Students' Activism in Nigeria

Students' activism in Nigeria consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform by Nigerian students, with the desire to make changes in society towards a perceived greater good. Students' activism is likened to practice of taking direct or covert action to achieve political, economic, social and educational goals. As an action part of students' engagement, it crystalizes itself into expression of preferences or opposition against authorities of higher learning and government policy through protests, mass demonstration and public conscientization. These are done through rallies, protests, marches, boycott, and strike, lawsuits, lobbying, petitions, and strikes (Igbadiwei, 2020).

Historically, students' activism have manifested through campus organisation, democratic and civic engagement, leadership development, and community engagement in Nigeria (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Barnhardt, 2012; Farago, Swadener, Richter, Eversman & Roca-Servat, 2018). Students' activism fosters students' capacities for engaging in socially-responsible collective action both in campus and outside it (Barnhardt, 2012). It thus mean that students' activism extends beyond students' unionism and activities of elected representatives on campuses, it includes the activities of all affiliated students leadership structures on students welfare and advocacy for public good in the society. In sum, students' activism is not restricted to campus affairs; it involved consistent engagement with the drivers of political spectrums in the state and federal level.

Garwe (2017) was clear in his opinion when he opined that activism is a fulcrum of Nigerian students' engagement within and outside the tertiary institutions. It is part of the spectrum of the students' voices. By implication, Nigerian students' bodies tend to galvanise views and evolve strategies designed to promote students' interests and public welfare through activism.

Chiamogu (2018, p. 68) noted that students' activism includes work and action by students to cause political, environmental, economic, or social change in their stead. This definition reflects that students play political role in both developed and underdeveloped countries. Students assume political force even before finishing their studies by "bringing national, tribal, and local politics into the campus in a very direct way (Roucek, 1967, p.115).

In Nigeria, students' activism and other related students' movements were the offshoot of the West African Students Union founded in London on August 9, 1925, an umbrella for West African students in various foreign universities. The Union was led by two Nigerian students, Ladipo Solanke and Herbert Bankole-Bright. Thus, WASU became the bedrock on which the ember of students' activism and engagements were birthed from (Peter & Ebimobowei, 2015; Kukah, 1999; Olugbade, 1990; Adelabu & Akinlosotu, 2009). It is noteworthy to situate that some of the highlights of WASU activities were the rostrum of opposition against colonial relics in West Africa, advocacy for self-rule, expropriation of resources and other unequal relationship with the metropolitan states.

The activities of WASU had influenced many and served as an eye-opener to students' activism in Nigeria. Thus, the formation of the University College, Ibadan in 1948 provided Nigerian students with the opportunity to put in place a union with the aim to promote student welfares within the Nigeria's socio-political and educational hemispheres. As corroborated by Oyekanmi (2014), it is in lieu of the stated role of WASU, that the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) was founded in 1956 with late Ambassador Emmanuel Obe as its first elected President. It was argued that NUNS was founded following the structural changes in the West African Student Union (NUNS Fact File, 2013). Okagbare (2019) pointed out that NUNS was formed as a body that brought together all Nigerian students from home and abroad. It did not only serve as a common platform where issues that concern students are discussed and their interests protected, but also as a mirror against the backdrop of governance crisis in Nigeria.

Ogunbodede, Idowu and Odeyemi (2020, p. 104) have observed, NUNS inherited that same idealism as WASU, which affirmed the view that a student union could consistently be a platform for change and informed activism. The NUNS was proactive in opposing government policies that are antithetical to students' rights and educational conditions (Kukah, 1999). Following the ban of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in 1976 by the Olusegun Obasanjo junta led administration, another student association known as National Organisation of Nigerian Students (NONS) was birthed. As Kukah (1999) put it, although the death of NUNS severely limited the scope of students' activism, the students remained defiant and

committed to their cause. This they did by reinventing and regrouping themselves, hence the formation of NONS was announced in 1979. That same year was when NONS met its Waterloo with the election of Mr. Tanimu Knifi from Bayero University, Kano as the President. The new president got into trouble when he accused the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar of the University of Financial Impropriety. Without wasting time, both the President and his Secretary were rusticated immediately from the University (Igbadiwei, 2020). At the restoration of democratic rule in 1979 paved way for resuscitation of NUNS structure, when the new government of Alhaji Shehu Usman Shagari fulfilled his campaign promise to unban students' unionism and grant them due recognition. Not minding the gesture, the student leaders decided to re-invent their identity under a new name, which after several deliberations came to be known as the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) founded in 1980. According to its website, NANS is poised to be the largest students' movement in Africa. It is the umbrella body of all students' organisations in Nigeria and in diaspora. Since its inception, NANS has fought for justice, good governance and the rule of law. Besides, NANS campaigns for the enforcement of students' rights and academic freedom, as well as promotion of youth involvement in decision-making process, sustenance of democracy, and peace-building. Comrade Sunday Danladi was the first NANS President.

Oyekanmi (2020) was convinced that the struggle for Nigeria's demilitarisation and respect for democratic ethos became more strengthened through organised protests and mass mobilisation by Nigerian students. With this reality in mind, it is harkened to truth to situate students protest within the realm of expressed anger and displeasure of students directed at managers of institutions of learning, institutions and political authorities. The periscope of student protests extend beyond the need to protect education interests, it does involve a great deal of influencing public policy. Students' protests in Nigeria over the years have reflected the dual values of contests against authorities of higher institutions of learning to drawing battle lines with accredited state actors on unpopular policies. Thus, students' activism remained a popular phenomenon during the era of Nigeria's military interregnum. The *Ali Must Go* protest of April 1978 was a watershed in students' activism in Nigeria. The National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), which was the umbrella body for Nigerian students as at then instigated and participated in series of campus protests nationwide against the increased fees in the federal universities. This is regarded in the history of Nigeria as *Ali Must Go* protests. The protests followed the increase in cost of meal tickets from ₦1.50 to ₦2.00. Another cause of the protest was low number of federal government-owned universities and lack of state-owned universities in the country (Igbadiwei, 2020).

Consequently, the then President of NUNS, Segun Okeowo, who was at that period a student at the University of Lagos, mobilised students across the country and challenged the then Minister of Education, Ahmadu Ali, who later shifted blame on the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of Olusegun Obasanjo led military government (Igbadiwei, 2020). By implication, the three universities were closed down indefinitely, NUNS was banned and the NUNS president, Segun Okeowo, and members of staff in various universities, who got involved in the protests, were expelled and dismissed, respectively. There was widespread looting and spontaneous violence (Ojo, 1980).

Demonstration against the annulment of 12 June 1993 election, statements and declarations against Military Juntas and draconian decrees were organised with joy. NANS as the umbrella body for Nigerian students issued many terse statements and declarations against military juntas and draconian decrees. NANS and other affiliated civil society groups collaborated to unleash patriotic anger against election malfeasance and saboteurs of public interest. The military leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida would not forget the backlash he received from Nigerian students on the annulment of Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola's (MKO) mandate of June 12, 1993 (Igbadiwei, 2020).

As Eesuola (2013) has observed, student's union leaders and all cadres of their movements were critically involved in the demilitarisation process and peaceful return to civil rule in Nigeria. As argued by Igbadiwei (2020) students were at the vanguard of democratic struggle at the time when the Nigerian political parties were weak and ineffective from playing strong opposition politics. The students' movements became the vanguard of constructive criticism and checks against military dictatorship. This was even at the height of many potential threats, abuse of rights, draconian arrest and harassment that are always visited those who hold different opinions to military engagements. This was evident in Olugbade's (1990) eulogy of Nigerian students for their crowd mobilisation capacity in protest against military rule, despite intimidation and draconian arrest. The students' leadership provided the needed excitements, youthful energy and chorus aluta songs at mass rallies alongside other democratic coalitions and civil societies especially in the struggle for the restoration of Moshood Abiola's mandate after the annulment of the election by the military head of state. Students' activists have also been involved in the campaign against devaluation of Naira and thus, have remained concerned on the need for fiscal and monetary measures to stimulate domestic production in the country. At the height of students' protest, export diversification from oil as monolithic source of foreign exchanged was strongly advocated, restructure

and revitalisation of productive economy were part of the issue-based agitation by Nigerian students during the anti-SAP protest.

The austerity measures introduced by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of Babangida administration, increased poverty and there tuitions increment to address economic downturn. Undeniably, SAP had devastating effect on the welfare and living conditions of Nigerians. This hardship triggered frustrating reactions from different segments in the societies. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and other civil societies vehemently opposed SAP. However, the most active and critical opposition was from the Nigerian Students led by NANS (Shetima, 1993). The students' movements and its affiliated leadership collaborated with other stakeholders in the society to stage protests, attend symposium and mass mobilisation of unsuspecting public against the economic implications of SAP policy. It was impressive how students were able to deploy their numerical strengths in protest and issuance of press releases against inimical government policy.

Oil Subsidy removal has occupied the socio-political and economic discussion in Nigeria from the early 90's and has remained the fulcrum of economic debate into the Fourth Republic. Thus, as an economic policy, it has not only birthed advocates for its removal, and virulent opposite opinions, the public outcry and demonstrations that have greeted it have dominated the media space for long. Fawole and Tessy (2022) opined that fuel subsidy removal has created org of violence and condemnation from different spheres of the Nigerian societies; civil societies, labour congress and student bodies inclusive.

The nuances surrounding fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria started in April 1992, when General Ibrahim Babangida as the Head of State, increased the price of petroleum litre to 20kobo from 15.3kobo. The increment continued till March 6, 1991, when the price was increased to 70kobo as the last price until he stepped aside in 1993. The trajectory of fuel price increments spanned through Chief Ernest Shonekan regime, which increased the price from 70 kobo to 5Naira. In 1994, the Abacha junta increased a litre of petroleum price to 15 naira before it was reduced to 11naira and later 25 naira. At the return of democracy in 1999, the Obasanjo Administration promised fuel subsidisation as the bedrock of his economic policy but he soon reengaged on such electoral promise by increasing fuel prices on many occasions. Undoubtedly, the highlights of subsidy removal issue held Nigeria to spell bound during the administration of formal President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2012. There were massive protests by the Nigerian students, civil societies, labour unions and other affiliated leftists (Dawn Commission, 2016).

At the vanguard of various struggles and opposition against successive governments on the removal of fuel subsidy, were the Nigerian students and their leadership. The student's role in these civil agitations in collaborations with labour unions, are premised on the untold hardship and economic deprivation the policy is projected to have on the common man. Thus, Nigerian students have remained critical and vocal actors against the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. This has continued from military era, to civil leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo, Goodluck Jonathan and President Muhammadu Buhari administration. In the heat of fuel subsidy crisis in 2012, the National Association of Nigerian Students, NANS, Joint Campus Committee, Ondo State Students, including NAOSS issued many press releases to condemn the announced subsidy removal. They argued that such policy is not only anti masses, but that it is also against the interest of her members as signpost pacts of political elites to appropriate the public matrimony to themselves. The student bodies threatened to mobilise her teeming numbers to make the country ungovernable. In another release, the students' leadership gave President Goodluck Jonathan 24hours to rescind his decision or face continued civil unrest (Johnson, 2012).

The trajectory of the students' struggles against the fuel subsidy removal has grown unabated into the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, whose economic policy has shown the readiness to remove fuel subsidy at different intervals, although, the action has always been opposed by various students' movements through the organisational strengths of their numbers and in collaboration with labour unions and civil society groups. In 2022, NANS collaborated with the National Labour Congress to reject federal government plan to remove fuel subsidies. The quick fireworks opposition was fuelled by the submission of the Group Managing Director, Nigerian Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) that a litre of petrol could sell for #340 from February of the same year. The then NANS President, Comrade Sunday Asefon in a terse statement, threatened to shut down Nigeria against the subsidy removal. The President declared that such mass mobilisation and civil unrest would be a needed patriotic response of the students against mass impoverishment, economic slavery and aggravation of the already worsened conditions of workers, parents and students entirely. The student body strongly also advised the government to fix the four moribund refineries to ensure efficiency (Olowolagba, 2021).

There have been some other cases of students' activism in Nigeria where students' leadership intellectually engaged government and higher institutions authority on matters of education funding and demand for governance within the public realm. These were done successfully with envisioned results achieved without recourse to violence and civil unrest. For instance, in 2012, the students' union of Tai Solarin University of

Education led by Comrade Abdullahi Abiodun Oyekanmi who was the president at the time, engaged and opposed the Government of Ogun State on the pronounced scrapping of TASUED. Senator Ibikunle Amosun, the Governor of the state at the time had announced the scrapping of the university and her students were profiled to be merged with students of Faculty of Education in Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun state. Instead of violent protest and vandalism of public property, the students engaged the government through media war of facts and civil gathering of her members through the modus operandi of ‘Operation Occupy TASUED’. Through such media and peaceful engagements of government and members of the public, their cause won more public admirers, embarrassed the government decision as unpopular and thus, the government had to rescind the scrapping decision.

Historical Overview of Students’ Protests in Nigeria

The historical affinity of students’ activism in Nigeria is traceable to the formation of West African Students Unions in 1925 and subsequently the establishment of the University College in Ibadan in 1956. These significant events propelled the first students association in Nigeria known as National Unions of Nigerian Students (NUNS). This was corroborated by Akinboye and Eesuola (2015) that organized students association and their activities began even before Nigeria’s independent. Thus, their patriotic activities against military interregnum and ensuing protests against bad governance in the post-independent era were not coincident. NUNS was to later crystalized into National Association of Nigerian Students in 1980 as the umbrella for all Nigerian Students (Kukah, 1999).

It is pertinent to situate that students’ protests are not restricted to campuses in higher institutions, it includes demonstration against government policies in the larger political spectrum. There was the famous *Alli Must Go* protest in Ahmadu Bello University against University authority on students’ welfare and undue harassment. The protest spread into other students campuses across the country, followed with wildfire, destructions and loss of lives that which forced Federal Government to close down all Universities. It is noteworthy to reckon that Nigerian students through protests have also acted as the conscience of the Nation which includes series of protests against key government policies such as oil subsidy removal, Structural Adjustment Programme and military interventionism in Nigeria’s politics (Ogunbodede, Idowu & Odeyemi, 2020). In recent times, protest has become a most popular engagement pattern of students against slavocratic policies against education, members’ welfare and good governance. This is strengthened through the exploration

of students' impressive numbers to draw attention as critical stakeholders in education and governance matters.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted Critical Mass Theory. Evidently, students' activism is better contextualised within the framework of Critical Mass Theory (CMT). Oliver (2013) opined that the theory has its origin from nuclear physics, where smallest quantity of fissile matter is used to ignite a nuclear reaction. As a theory, it is attributed to the work of Kanter (1977), that became popular in 1980's on gender and minority question in the social sciences on how change in status quo can be effected by the minorities who are able to organise themselves in great numbers. The theory is an analytic framework of how interdependent decisions accumulate into collective actions to effect desired change. The theory is used to describe a group of people united in the pursuit of desired change.

As further analysed by Oliver (2013), critical mass theory is the interplay of collective actions to effect desired goal that would not have been possible through individual solitary efforts. Addis (2007) corroborated Oliver's argument that critical mass theory is a collection of actions of many cadres, who are conscious and motivated to cause a social change. The theory has been used by a number of other scholars, such as Garwe (2017), Marwel and Oliver (1993), Dian-Fu Chang and Hsiao-chi Chang (2018) in their various studies. As metaphoric usage, critical mass theory explains how people come together to change status quo through the influence of numbers and crowd mobilisation. In the perception of social movement's activist, critical mass theory deals with protest and mass action big enough to upstage socio-political and economic policies or values.

The central thesis or assumptions of the theory are that "critical mass" or what is likened to 'mob action' behaves differently from individuals, not minding their membership of any group. The theory also argued that decisions or engagements that emanate from critical mass or massive mobilisation of interests are likely to produce greater public values. The theory concluded that unity and solidarity are far more efficient and influential in collective action, interest aggregation and articulation.

In Nigeria, the activism of students and its leadership on government policies, demand for better education and treatment of their members are patterned into mass action, protests and critical mobilisation of social movements to galvanise support for their demands. In other dimension, it is increasingly difficult to separate students' activism from mass rally and protest as response to government policies and programmes that are considered inimical to students' welfare. In many university campuses, protests are popular means of expressing displeasure to increment of tuition

fees and other misdemeanours from school administrators. In the realm of public policy engagements with established political authorities, and in South West in specific, students' activism consistently adopts protest and massive public awareness to pressure government to do or discontinue certain rules or policy. The students' structures and organisational affiliates are consciously mobilised and conscientised to support or express discontents on a given issue.

As part of its shortfalls, critical mass theory overemphasised the role of changing social, political and economic events through the numbers of the mob, without considering the possibility of some dissidents, who can manipulate the unsuspecting public psychology for self-whims and caprices. It is a practical reality that the mob or majority cannot always be rational. It is also rather too hasty to conclude that the mass mobilisation mantra of the critical mass theory is representative of the greater majority number or interest of the whole concerned population or group members. Socio-political and economic reality reckons that in most cases, the interests or demands expressed through protest or mass induced action are more likely the projected interests of the vocal, organised and proactive minority. In effect, while we can agree that students' exploration of the power of numbers to influence government policies to "people-centric" as it was the case in the struggle for decolonisation and demilitarisation, there have also been verifiable cases of students' activism in the guise of popular demands, which later turned to the interest of the privileged and active few in Nigeria. Another blind spot of the theory is noticeable in its inability to distinguish between positive mass action and negative mass actions and its likely consequences.

The CMT as fondly called, is relevant to this work, in the reality that students' activism relies heavily on numerical strength and leftist reactions to draw the attention of members of the public and pressure government to reverse certain policies or toe certain line of actions. The mob – rule and spontaneous reaction comes with potential violence and threats against established authorities. These include protests, issuance of terse communiqué and ultimatum and other civil unrest stratagem. Through mass mobilisation across campuses, students' activists draw attention to their demands and seemingly get public sympathy in the drive to build a prosperous nation.

Methodology

The paper relied on systematic review of secondary data from relevant published journals, books, public lectures, online materials and case studies. The academic materials from these sources were carefully selected and synthesized in accordance to their relevance to the phenomenon of the study.

This was done to examine the relationship between students' activism and institutional governance in Nigerian universities, draw a pattern of students' protest regularity with references to case studies, causes, effects and situate students' activism involvement in the governance structures of Nigerian universities.

Causes of Students Protest in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, protests have become a reverberated phenomenon in student's engagements, either with higher institutions of learning authorities or state actors regarding policy formulation and implementation. It is imperative to interrogate the causal and effect of this student's culture of engagements to ensure overarching conclusions and benefits for all key actors. Oyekanmi (2020) argued that the key reason for most students protest is associated to lack of trust and mutual suspicion between students' leadership and managers of higher institutions of learning. Ostensibly, students' representatives have a mental hatred for Vice- Chancellors and Deans of Students Affairs. Thus, it is always easy to stifled easy communication channels which could have allowed for amicable resolution of contentious issues. Hence, protests becomes the alternative. This was posited by Moborode (2021) that students' leadership and school authorities often times relate like people in war front when they are expected to relate as partners in the pursuit of the institutions progress and development.

Poor governance and elitist public policies are also reputed for various mass revolts and protest from Nigerian students. In the conclusion of Marbeck and Kowel (2021) aside from Nigerian students' opposition against the relics of colonialism in the post-independence era, the fulcrum of curated protests by NANS has been propelled by the governance crisis in the Nigerian states. The astronomical increment in the cost of education, removal of oil subsidy, humongous foreign debts and rising level of poverty have been the bedrock of students protests not only in Nigeria but in the developing countries (Mimiko, 2017).

In the opinion of Oyekanmi and Adebajo (in press) students' radicalism, mob rabidity and protests are caused by the lack of students maturity, diplomacy and rational capacity to engage key actors on matters of education, members welfare and state political machineries. This perspective reinforces Fuer's (1969) assertion on students' activism. Fuer had concluded that students protests and interests articulation are always warped in excessive sense of entitlement, unnecessary anger and jealousy towards the status of the political class.

Adeyemi (2009) was critical of the usual poor relationship among students' eggheads, tertiary institutions leadership and government as the basis of students' unrests in Nigeria. This was corroborated by Adeyemi,

Ekundayo and Alonge (2009) when they asserted that students crisis could have been averted if government and tertiary institutions leadership accord students leadership the recognition as political elites in training without treating them with disdain and inconsequential attention. It is noteworthy that those who assumed the role of students' leadership are no longer ordinary students. They are now saddled with enormous responsibilities, with the faith of many other students depending on their actions and inactions. Thus, any disconnection in relationship with students has the propensity to build anger, resentment and protests (Akeusola, Viatonu, & Asikhia, 2012).

However, students' strategy of mobilising their teeming members in form of protests, riots and expression of anger are clear expression of the central value of the critical mass theory as adopted in the paper. The theory eulogised the need for minority to adequately organise themselves and cause public tension through protests. Conversely, the attendant effects of many documented students protests in Nigeria have brought to the fore, an unimaginable ruination, destruction of public properties and loss of precious lives that have further weakened the fabric relationship between Nigerian political class and the young political elites in training. One of the highlight effect of the protracted students' protests in Nigeria is that the political class now have their doubt in the capacity of the younger elements to take over more public responsibilities efficiently and creditably. Thus, students' leadership are now mostly seen as lacking in the required temperamental intelligence to manage competing interests maturely and peacefully without violence. Etaneki and Okolie (2020) shared this that many disoriented students protests reverses the previous gain of peaceful engagement and dialogue.

Impact of Students' Protests on Nigerian Universities Governance Structure

The Nigerian universities have as their most significant part of her population, the students. Students are usually the main stakeholders in tertiary institutions including the universities. They are as unique as the university itself. This is why it is difficult for university management to administer the affairs of the university alone without the students. Therefore, students' associations and unions avail students the opportunity to interact beyond the four walls of their classrooms and be involved in the affairs of their schools (Akinboye & Eesuola, 2015, p.149). Through this, university students are prepared for "future political role of their countries even during their studentship tenures" (Lipset, 1967, p.5, cited in Akinboye & Eesuola, 2015, p.150).

In a survey carried out by Adelabu and Akinsolu (2009) on Nigerian university students vis-à-vis their level of political education through the university submitted that “the university is a training ground not only for cross fertilisation of ideas but for knowledge development whereby the three domains of education, such as cognitive, affective and psychomotor are developed” (p. 51). Higher institution of learning has been considered as unique learning places where students’ political behaviour are designed and influenced in order to become members of the elites of their societies (Lipset, 1967).

Hodgkinson and Melchiorre (2019) submitted unlike private universities, state –funded universities provide students with opportunity to foster political, union and solidarising relationship among students. Oyekanmi (ongoing research) submitted that students’ activism through its affiliated structures on various campuses are part of some governance structures in Nigerian universities. The students’ union presidents who head the central executive council of students’ politics on campus are traditionally members of their universities academic and ceremonial committees. While the general secretaries or other appointed SUG officers are statutory members of students’ disciplinary committee of the universities. However, Oyekanmi (2020) expressed displeasure that students are underrepresented in the key governance structures of the universities system. He added that students’ leadership need to be actively integrated as members of the universities governing councils to expose them to the real business of universities administration, dynamics of decision making and to offer them direct opportunity to influence the decisions that affect students’ interest.

In the study conducted by Oyekanmi and Adebajo (forthcoming p.x), students’ activism have had less influence on the governance structures of universities due to the authoritarian nature of most universities management. The consequences of these are the orgies of violence, unabated students protests, academic unrest and acrimonious relationship between students affiliated leadership and managers of universities. Thus, in the alternatives to their due recognition, students have adopted critical mass engagement strategy to press home their demands. The strategy is an adaptation from the critical mass theory popularised by Kanters (1977) as adopted in this study. The theory places protests and mass action as a strategy to change statuesque, effect policy changes and pressure certain elements to shift grounds in the interest of the protesters.

While students’ protests have succeeded to force universities management to rescind some decision and cower to students’ agitations and threats, it has also failed in some instances. Instead, it led to collateral damage of students’ unions, deflated their public image and cause wanton destructions of properties. A case in view of some failed protests was

captured in Tai Solarin University of Education in 2014 where the students' union president mobilised students to protest against university policy of 'no tuition fee, no examination'. The second semester examination was disrupted, lecture halls and Vice-Chancellor's office were vandalised by the mob and some student's union leaders were also beaten. The investigation that followed showed that the protest was hijacked by dissidents' students and cult members who seized the opportunity to cause mayhem on rival cult groups. In the same manner, the students of Federal University of Agriculture in Abeokuta Ogun State staged violence protests in 2017 against tuition increment and implementation of dress codes policies without adequate consultations with the students' leadership. Unfortunately, the protest extended beyond the campus into the cities of Abeokuta where taxis, public buses and other public properties were destroyed beyond recognition (Oyekanmi, 2020).

The negative aftermath of the two cases cited confirmed the criticism against the critical mass theory where vocal minority interests are disguised as public interests to cause mayhem and heightened destruction. It thus suffices to state that protest through mob action cannot strengthen students influence on the governance structure of their universities and that except students eggheads embrace consultation, dialogue and diplomacy in their agitation, their relationship with universities policy makers are likely to be frosty and counterproductive to progressive partnership (Oyekanmi, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Students' activism and protest is an aged global phenomenon with varying dimensions. While students' activism and ensuing protests have reduced in the developed countries, it has assumed higher intensity and unabated growth in Third World countries, Africa and Nigeria in particular. The paper thus concludes that as long as disconnection exists between students' expectations on education and governance issues in relations with ensuing reality of practical policy implementation, the point of contacts will habitually result to conflicts and protests which is adjudged as antithetical to development and collective state harmony.

The paper recommends for the reconfiguration of the students' affairs units of all tertiary institutions with individuals who are more receptive to students' psychology, empathy and clear understanding important nuances around students' movements, needs and priorities. Having popular students' union leaders as Dean and Students' Affairs Officers will reinforce students trust in the tertiary institutions management and offer brightest opportunity needed to nip any crisis in the bud. Intentional efforts should equally be made to offer practical exposure to students' leadership on the processes

involved in the university administration. This can be done by widening their integration as members into critical committee of the universities notably the Governing Council. This will help to improve their analytical reasons and first-hand knowledge on the business of their schools. It will also strengthen the accountability posture of the institution on finance and other policies which could cause friction with the students.

Students' activism on campuses and through National Association of Nigerian Students' (NANS) engagements can be reinvigorated to be productive if tertiary institutions make efforts to ensure that only matured students with interpersonal skills and appreciable value for peace and negotiation over violence assume position of leadership of students' unions. This help all institutions to produce rational partners in progress and solutions providers as students' unions leaders as against agent provocateurs and harbinger of violence on campuses. Lastly, managers of higher institutions should be humane, democratic and involving in their policy initiation and general administration in manners that students would not feel victimised and inconsequential. The political class must also take full responsibility to ensure delivery of good governance that eradicate poverty, ensure affordable education, improved students and staff welfare.

References

- Adejuwon, K., & Okewale, R. (2009). Ethnic militancy, insurrections and democracy in Africa: The case of Nigeria. *Journal of Social and Policy Issues*, 6(4), 79–90.
- Adelabu, M., & Akinsolu, A. (2009). Political education through the university: A survey of Nigerian university students. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relation*, 3(2), 46-53.
- Adeyemi, T. O. (2009). Causes, consequences and control of student's crises in public and private universities in Nigeria. *Academic Journals of Educational Research and Review*, 4(4), 156–163.
- Adeyemi, T. O., Ekundayo, H. T., & Alonge, H. O. (2010). Managing students' crisis in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in National Development*, 8,(1) 1–15.
- Adejuwon, M. & Okewole, R. (2009). Students' unrest and the shortfall of Nigeria's political class. *Journal of Education and Development Studies*, 3(2), 26- 42.
- Akeusola, O., Viatonu, O., & Asikhia, O. A. (2012). Perceived causes and control of student's crises in higher institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(10), 29–43. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234633583.pdf>.
- Akinboye, S. O., & Eesuola, O. S. (2015). Students union, university administration and political development of nations. *African Research Review (AFREV)*, 9(1), 146-158. Doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v9i1.12>

- Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L., Ikeda, E., & Yee, J. (2000). *How service learning affects students*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.
- Barnhardt, C. L. (2012). *Contemporary student activism: The educational contexts of socially-responsible civic engagement*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Michigan, Michigan, USA.
- Chiamogu, A. P. (2018). Student activism and social change in Nigerian tertiary institutions: A call to service. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, Management and Technology (MJSMT)*, 1(1), 66-76.
- Ekundayo, H. T., & Alonge, H. O. (2010). Managing students' crisis in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. *Journal of Research National Development*, 8(1), 71-90.
- Etaneki, A. F., & Okolie, U. C. (2020). Students' unrest: An evaluation of influencing factors and control in tertiary educational institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education*, 25(1), 192-210. Retrieved from <https://uav.ro/jour/index.php/jpe/article/view/1456/1507>.
- Farago, F., Swadener, B. B., Richter, J., Eversman, K. A., & Roca-Servat, D. (2018). Local to global justice: Roles of student activism in higher education, leadership development, and community engagement. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 64(2), 154-172.
- Garwe, E. C. (2017). *Student voice: Embracing student activism as a quality improvement tool in higher education*. INTECH: Global Voices in Higher Education. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.68669>.
- Hodgkinson, D., & Melchiorre, L. (2019). Introduction: Student activism in an era of decolonisation. *Africa*, 89(1), 1-14. Doi: 10.1017/S0001972018000888
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of corporation*, New York: Basic Books
- Kukah, M. H. (1999). *Democracy and civil society in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Farago, F., Swadener, B. B., Richter, J., Eversman, K. A., & Roca-Servat, D. (2018). Local to global justice: Roles of student activism in higher education, leadership development, and community engagement. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 64(2), 154-172.
- Fawole, M. & Tessy, O. (2022). Fuel subsidy crisis and economic question in Nigeria. *Journal of Development Economies*, 21(4), 27- 41.
- Feuer, L. (1969). *The conflict of generations: The character and significance of student movements*. New York: Basic Books.
- Luescher, T. M. (2018). Chapter 13: Altbach's theory of student activism in the twentieth century: Ten propositions that matter. In J. Burkett (Ed.), *Students in twentieth-century Britain and Ireland* (pp. 297-317). Doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58241-2_13
- Marbeck, O. & Kowel, E. (2021). National Association of Nigerian Students and advocacy for good governance: A review. *African Journal of Politics and Development*, 5(1), 60-74
- Merton, R. (1945). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Mimiko, F. (2017). *Getting our universities back on track: Reflections and governance paradigms from my Vice Chancellorship*. Austin: Pan Africa University Press.

- Moborode, E. O. (2021). *Students' leadership and post -independence struggle in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Ibadan Publisher.
- Ogunbodede, O. S., Idowu, H. A., & Odeyemi, T. I. (2020). Students' union-management relations and conflict resolution mechanisms in Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. *Accord Journal of Conflict Resolution (AJCR)*, 20, 103-131.
- Okagbare, M. (2019). Democracy and the role of the National Association of Nigerian Students. *GRIN*. Retrieved from <https://www.grin.com/document/505891>
- Olugbade, K. (1990). Nigerian students and political mobilisation. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 5(1), 39-57.
- Oliver, P. (2013). Critical mass theory. The Wiley-Black Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements. DOI: 10.1002/9780470674871.
- Oyekanmi, A. A., & Adebajo, A. A. (In press). Students' activism and the challenges of nation-building: The Nigeria's experience. *Nigeria Journal of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria*.
- Oyekanmi, A. A. (2020). *Leadership qualities in student's unionism*. A paper presented at a leadership workshop for newly elected students' union leaders of Tai Solarin University of Education, at the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) College: Oke-Mosan, Ogun State, Saturday 21st February.
- Oyekanmi, A. A. (2014). Strains of students' unionism and political activism in Nigerian campuses. *Journal of Inquiries in Sociological Studies*, 1(1), 176-191.
- Park, R., & Burgess, E. (1921). *Introduction to the science of sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Parsons, T. (1937). *The structure of social action*. New York: Free Press.
- Peter, Z. E., & Ebimobowei, S. T. (2015). Leadership and student unionism, challenges and solutions in the Nigerian tertiary education system (colleges of education, polytechnics and universities). *European Scientific Journal*, 11(25), 382-392.
- Roucek, J. S. (1967). The political role of students in underdeveloped countries. *Comparative Education*, 3(2), 115-121. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3098369>.
- Shetima, K. A. (1993). Structural adjustment and the student movement in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 7(3), 83-91.
- Smelser, N. J. Turner, R. H., & Killian, L. M. (2021). Collective behavior. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/science/collective-behaviour>.
- Wilmot, T. & Hackett, Y. (1998). Public anger and the gains of dialogue on public policy: Cases from Nigeria's protest. *Journal of Community Interaction and Development*, 4(2), 16- 36