



Students as agents of change: Protest movements in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

A protest which was highly unlikely occurred in January 2020, by school students from Njube Secondary School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The main cause of the protest was the hiking of school fees and the strikes accompanied by the teachers which brought into light the quality of their education system. There were few more protests that followed this. The right to education is compulsory according to the constitutions of the country but the problem lies when realistically looking at their education systems. It is of absolute necessity that the government provides a helping hand to students who are specially beginners, as they are the forerunners of the revolutionary world.

The 21st century learners should be the change agents of their region. In order to bring meaningful changes, they have to bring forth the essential skills that are required this century, such as communication and collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving skills, creativity and imagination, digital literacy and soft skills. This could be only achieved by catering quality and proper education to them. The Njube school students are voicing up for this quality that has been drifted away from them. Quality education would impact on the socio-cultural, economic movements of the country. Moreover, it would flourish job opportunities where unemployment is one of the crying evils of the time. In fact, they have the dimensions in identifying the capacity of being the next change.

Background

Student protests are rampant worldwide and it has begun to define our contemporary times. These protests led by students especially in South Africa have led to extremely violent clashes among universities and finally claimed the closure of their educational institutions within the nation (Rao & Wasserman, 2017). Zimbabwe has been a country of having an extended history of student activism and recently a protest originated by some school students in Bulawayo. These young students were protesting for a more quality education system to be implemented in their education system. Njube Secondary School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe began a protest about the hiking of school fees by their authorities. According to the news recorded by the Chronicle news reporter it is said that

there was an unusual protest by the school students from of Njube High School which took place with a number more than hundred and fifty. The reason for the protest was the hiking of school fees which was initially \$92 but has been increased up to \$440. The protest is said to have been led by one of their school teachers. “The science teacher, Mr Brian Mutsiba, who incited the students to protest that their teachers had abandoned lessons due to poor salaries, is now on the run”.

Mazuba in his news article provides further details about the protest. He describes how the students held posters which read ‘Where is UNICEF?’, ‘SOS Save Our Souls’ and ‘This Is For Every Zimbabwean Child’. According to him the Njube police were in search of the biology teacher as he is supposed to be apprehended by charging him for attempting to promote public violence amidst the general crowd, for breaching the peace and for “insulting the flag” which violates the Flag of Zimbabwe Act. Chief Inspector Ramaphosa of Njube police signed the memo by stating that “The school pupils were merely following their teacher’s orders,” and that the “Parents did not know why their children were protesting”. First of all the students calling for UNICEF emphasizes the fact that they want international attention to the matter, secondly the police is blaming the teacher for leading the protest. What the government needs to understand is that this not the voice of a single teacher but the voice of the students who are demanding for fair rights. Thirdly, news reporters mentioned that the parents did not know that their children were protesting. It is gibberish to report that parents are unaware of it while they are raising fees from \$92 to \$440 and parents not understanding why their children protest.

The chairperson of the Southern African Human Rights Defenders Coalition, states that the struggle towards unjust treatments and inequality has been prevalent throughout the generations and these protests led the civil society depicts the values of human rights are thriving. He witnessed this protest to be a game changer for the history of Zimbabwe because these protests by students have marked milestones since then. The student activism in the past led by the Zimbabwe students changed the history of the country by creating a better hope for the people. So, he saw the Njube student protest as one such movement, “1976, students became the hope for a better South Africa; 20-21 January 2020 a significant addition to the history of the role of students in carrying out their generational mandate to fight for the rights and dignity of all people.” Even though the relevant authorities have been oppressive and resisting towards the society, it is much appreciated that the youngsters have stepped out for their rights and values.

Causes, Concerns and Fallouts

Student activism in Rhodesia throughout the 1960s and 1970s against political agenda.

Student activism has been taking place in Zimbabwe in the past years where they have made it to be the only ground to express their grievances regarding the education system.

The education system has failed in many circumstances to cater the needs of the students. Omari and Mihiyo implies the fact how university students urge some kind of caring and attention, when this fails students tend to feel that “the only way to get things done and attract attention to their plight is to protest, demonstrate, boycott classes, and attack significant figures”. Successful student activism has played a crucial role in the past that has eventually influenced the contemporary students including the school students to protest within the country.

Yet these grievances have always met with constant violence which has been declared as the only language that is understood. Chikwanha comments on University of Zimbabwe affirming that “The nature of political socialization and the political culture in Zimbabwe are such that violence is perceived and accepted as the only language understood by authorities and opponents alike.” The gravity and severity of violence has become a sound that is unheard and further embedding violence in to their culture of politics determines the ground rules of a state. This has always been the crying evil of the time and the darkening future to come. If violence is the only language then for what is the purpose of education and why do we thrive for humanity?

1960's and 1970's during the Rhodesian movement led by the African students in University of Rhodesia portrayed one of the devastating protests that ever happened in the pre-independence history of the university. The reaction towards the movement from the government was extremely harsh where more than 150 were sentenced to prison from three to nine months, and the students were banned to enter university premises within twenty kilometers. There have been many protests in the past but never had been a movement as such as they destroyed the properties of the university that worth up to rupees seven thousand primarily due to the racist polarization within the country.

The polarization occurred as a result of the minority of white students that enjoyed more privileges than the majority black. 7th August 1973 was a date that has marked a milestone in the history of the African students because this was a period where the Rhodesian Government was very firm and strict towards any student uprising as they were facing all pressures that threatened them politically, economically and militarily. The government was cautious in actions and they would wreak vengeance upon any African that crossed the line opposing the continuation of the legal proceedings and further prolonging their existence. This is why Chimukwembe demonstration became more of a national struggle accompanied and led by student activists during the pre-independence era. The writer himself was a part of the anti-white movement.

Lack of quality education

Educational capacity of a person cannot be tested by conducting exams and calculating the results of it; at least it is not the best way. But it will assist us mostly when competing with the out bound world and gaining international accomplishments according to particular educational systems. The students fight for a quality education system for a reason, which is the literacy rate reflecting upon the quality of education that is given to them. What is in effect to be known is that Zimbabwe reached the highest literacy rate among the South African nations according to the results of United Nations Development Program, the male literacy rated as 94.2 per cent, female literacy rated as 87.2 per cent and the overall literacy rate of the country was rated as 90.7 per cent marking an outstanding achievement to Zimbabwe among the African countries. Even though Zimbabwe had a tertiary education system this has to be a great achievement for the country and the continent itself.

The literacy rate to a country has a significant importance, it will reduce ignorance and educational negligence among the people, the International Labor review has highlighted the fact that access to educational agendas and proper literacy is an absolute necessary to have increase public awareness regarding the most trending environmental and health concerns plus the reduction of family planning. Having a progressive literacy rate means the learners are keen to step into a more standardized way of learning which is clearly shown by the student protest. They are complaining about receiving a quality education system where there interests about their standardized version of quality are not met.

The standardized quality of education requires the core skills where the young people are given the 21st century essential skills which make them fully prepared for the competitive life and work that is crucial to face global economy. It will provide the platform for them to develop the right skills which includes novel ways of working, thinking and living in the global world. The British council introduced a new module for the youngsters to help them grow into creative and critical thinking citizens that will one day make them productive individuals to their country. The module includes critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, digital literacy, citizenship, student leadership and personal development. By catering these skills, the students will be fed with the proper edification to shape their own future by themselves.

Technological Advancement

Technological advancement is irresistible in the modern world. The industrial job market is frequently very specialized and they demand additional knowledge regarding technology. As a result of this, the students who pass out from school face utmost difficulty when entering the firms. This has been caused due to scarce and obsolete

equipment and a general mismatch between technologies used in institutions of learning and in industry.

Moore brings forth the fact that around 700000 in Africa (about 0.1 per cent of the population) use simple internet facility like the use of email. Technology absolutely plays a crucial role in the present world order and it has been constantly involved in the education system as well, Zimbabwe too has no much difference. Yet the progression of infrastructure to promote digital literacy is thriving down due to lack of financial backing. The main issue arises here, when the rest of the world have easy access to internet where the school students and teachers extensively engage in learning new literacy skills, the tertiary developing countries are left out. Particularly the rural schools have no computers even though it has been introduced to the education system long time back. Computers are only used by a limited amount of private schools and the high funded schools. Yet there are areas where even electricity has not been reached out. How will such families fund children to learn? The problem is that majority of the schools has no access to computer technology and only a minority does.

Shrinking of economic due to globalization and due to policies by leaders has made it a tertiary economy

The next challenge the Zimbabweans had to face with end of the Rhodesian movement was the economic shrinking of the country. The latter stage of the movement marked a transition to the ideologies that the government adopted at that time, it was a quite palpable fact that the sociological ideology that the government exercised was no longer relevant to the world which was yet to come. The world was thrown upon a constant flux where the economic affliction overwhelmed the government. Communism tends to shrink down and the world was moving towards capitalism enhancing liberal democracy.

In this journey the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) played an active role in strategizing the economy of the country. But the economy faced a fatal blow since the introduction of it in 1990. Zimbabwe entering the global market was unstoppable with globalization and it created an enormous competition for all countries in the world.

Cerny describes that the relationship will consist of one state that will receive a gain out of the process in which it will create a possibility to make one's local business international and on the other hand the one that loses from globalization which will finally have an end result of very less incomes and unemployment. It is where Zimbabwe had its failure by entering the global market, the country was not in the acquisition side, but rather in the losing side. In fact, Cerny depicts globalization as a matter that will not be just a container that enthralls politics, economics, and society, but as strainers, in which each area is filtered into the multifaceted policies of a globalizing world.

Globalization paved the path for the new countries to improve their countries both economically, socially and culturally. Best examples for these countries are India and China which entered the open market and became one of the greatest benefactors of the world through globalization. Even though Zimbabwe was supposed to be benefitting from globalization it did not happen. Introduction of the liberal reforms for the market economy proved fatal because it was a threat to the local sellers and largescale marketing led to the closing down of local industry as they could not compete with the global market. As a result, the government had to take precautions to reduce expenses that included education of the students and social services. Poverty became the enemy of the mob that it occurred extensively in Zimbabwe throwing many families to difficulties in sending their children to school and paying school fees. The economic performance of the country was shrinking down and the young population was the largest victims of it. Hence the government had no adequate measures to provide the necessary training and education to the students of the country which is why student protests were frequently evident.

Youth unemployment

Another reason for students to demand quality education is unemployment. The economic breakdown of the country however had a severe impact on the livelihood of the people creating a new passage of darkness to its youth, resulting in unemployment and underemployment. Fajana defines unemployment as a position where people are eager and enthusiastic in work but they fail to find definite jobs that provides a suitable payment according to the capability of work. Youth unemployment would become an even more wretched crisis in the developing countries especially in South Africa, because it will not just affect the downtrodden economy but would have a strong psychological influence over the mindset of its people.

The youth is of utmost importance to the progression of a state. The active involvement of them would help the country to flourish and the freshness of them should not be exploited. Proper education would make them become more innovative, mentally independent and promote cooperation amongst them for the welfare of the people. Hearn suggests that the youth undergoes frustration, humiliation, and rejection due to this and even if they wanted to become financially stable, the lack of resources would leave them empty handed obstructing themselves from being self-independent.

Majority of the Zimbabwe youth engage themselves in the musical field where they end up either accused for drug addiction, robbery, and many other crimes. There is no positivity in being unemployed, it would rather create a generation that is full of idleness and negligence. How can a country be handed over to a batch of neglected class that has no idea how the system runs? O'Higgins brings forth the negative roles that play in youth unemployment. The youth is flung upon violence, social rejection, vulnerability towards

poverty, and psychological corrupted minds. When these issues are being unaddressed it paves way for the educated youth to eagerly wait for some kind of a miracle to happen to them finally making them revolutionists and engage in constant protests to make their dreams come true.

It is necessary that Zimbabwe should take the successful and failed indications from the programs as well as different projects that have been initiated by other countries. Comprehending positive aspects of them by evading the negative outcomes would assist the country in implementing new reforms to the government curriculum. What is more important is the executing of the most crucial aspects in the right circumstance. For instance, by closely examining a case study of Somalia, it is evident that 75per cent of the youth in the country are residing without any job opportunities and there is a heavy migration of the learned scholars to developed countries for better vacancies to their qualifications.

Somalia commenced preparations to instigate Guaranteed Employment Policy as a precaution to reduce unemployment for the learned youth. They attempted to hire the students who pass out from their Secondary school straight away to work as Public Service employees. The positive aspect of this bold initiative was that the government assured that the students will gain a job. Nevertheless, Somalia found it hard-hitting due to wars that were being carried out. As a result, they could not adjust with the yearly batch who came out of school in seeking the jobs that they were promised. The government was over pressurized due to the fact that the school leavers had to do engage in working in public firms by the age of eighteen, but they failed to accomplish it. They could not reach the expected level of economy making the initiative a failure. Even though they attempted to execute an exclusive step it did not work favorably. Hence the students began migrating. It is important that the students should be properly nurtured and trained to serve their nation with patriotism. These qualities could be easily drifted apart when the administration shows minus interest about the welfare of the students.

The lesson that Zimbabwe should enthrall is the very fact that youth is extremely vulnerable and they are more liable to immigrate to another country if their mother countries are not ready to absorb their knowledge to support the home economy. This is why many hardworking students from tertiary economies travel abroad in search of well-paid jobs but in return they are developing the economy of a foreign country. The students' interest should be valued and their issues should be settled so that they will refrain from leaving the country. Entrepreneurship should be introduced for the students and it is the best way that the children will overcome their grievances. It is a dire necessity that the quality education system be reprogrammed in order to make children more efficient in their lives. Enforcing school students to be productive entrepreneurs will

serve the country positively in the long-run as they will be improving the economy of the state.

Major Trends

First, the protest would create would be a platform for the involvement of students/children to mark a new trend in protests which has a greater impact on the world. A solid example for one such movement would be Greta Thunberg, the young environmental activist from Stockholm, Sweden, created a new trend for protesting in the world for climate change including countries like Australia, Belgium, UK, US and Japan. She started her campaign in August 2018 and currently there are more than 1 million children involved in the movement. (Thunberg, 2019) Starting from school just as the students of Njube High school in Zimbabwe and she brought many students from the international arena to one platform. Social media played a vital role in this mission because she brought forth hash tag movements where around 20,000 children joined the protest until she reached the UN climate conference where she took a zero carbon emission ship to New York to address the world in the year 2019. In the UN conference she said "How dare you? I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean, yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you?".

Her speech went viral in social media, news, radios and television where the whole world got to know about this young activist and what she is protesting against. Thus she carried the world attention to a lime light where even the neglected got know the climate change crisis and global warming. The fifteen year old child earned her success at the point in which she was nominated for the Nobel Prize. Her activities gave a flashing message to the global undertaking against climate crisis which marked a new trend to the world where students started to strike in order to safe guard the planet bringing all the governments to attention and forcing them to take actions. Therefore the notion that school students could definitely have a broader influence on the governments and authorities could be validated by the climate change activists who took a major role into their hands to make a rapid change across the world. Thus they could create a new trend in the global protests amongst any other movements that has taken place in the world.

The second trend is that the Njube High school protest was said to have been led by one of the school science teachers. What should be taken into consideration is that, the students only need one activist like Greta and the tables will change. It will create a revolution where it would generate another trend where the students themselves would act as agents of change to fight for educational rights. There would be no external influence provoking them but the children would extensively engage themselves in protests without going to school. Boycotting school for rights no longer is seen as an act of indiscipline but rather proven to be bold moves taken by the activists to change the

system. They might fail in changing the system but that does not mean that they have failed to spread awareness by doing so. As a matter of fact, they will continue struggles to educate the masses by engaging themselves in it.

Thirdly as result of prolonged economic and political deprivation it would procreate a generation of youth that would constantly engage in protests. This would not be a positive impact on the students because imagine where the youth that should be flourishing the culture and society be protesting back and forth for what is deficient in the system. Their minds would be psychologically besmirched due to excessive protest and it will affect their entire lives. If they continuously protest about their field of interest then it will lose its effectiveness as a result of it. A protest should be done concerning a positive end result which will be only achieved by an effective movement. If people find it as an ordinary phenomenon exercised by a certain group of people, then it would not be productive.

Forecast in 2020

Violence: The protest as it appeared was a peaceful one carried out by the students. Yet there is no guarantee on how long the peaceful environment of this would last long if the government does not take any positive action. If the protest be likely to continue violence would be inevitable. Zimbabwe would be a pool of blood creating a devastating history and an obscure future to the generations to come.

Evolving of the movement: The protest movements are likely to evolve if the economic status in the country does not improve. The government should take measures to cut these issues from the grassroots level, if they take these protests for granted it is impossible to strategically react towards the future hazards caused by the same group of students.

Spillover effect: Continuous student protests would result in a spillover effect over the African region where other school students shall also be evoked by such movements.

Postulate that unemployment of the educated youth be addressed: The importance of entrepreneurship should be the best suggestion for the educated youth that are unemployed in Zimbabwe. Government should advocate young entrepreneurship to the school curriculum as well as the universities. Teaching and examining students should be encouraged so from their younger age they will engage themselves in doing something productive and later on in life they will find their own way of living. In this way the exhausted economy of the country could be mended and on the other hand students would avoid conflicting with the government for jobs.

A wave of global protests: Finally, there is a higher tendency that the national discourse would become an international discourse because the protests are led by students. Just

as Greta Thunberg being the revolutionist and heroine of the younger generation, the fight for educational rights too will be of significance for them. It does not take long to build up a transnational chain for ambitious students who want to make a change in society.

Conclusion

The student movements cannot be neglected and ignored; their basic needs should be one of the major concerns of the state. It is not just the responsibility of state but also their duty to make the children more innovative and productive citizens of their country. Change is necessary for people to grow, if they students are ready to be the next positive agents of change, there is better hope for the future of Zimbabwe. Secretary General of the United Nations addressed the youth in the year 2012 on the celebration of the International Youth Day. What he said in his speech was that the youth should be given adequate sustenance in order to build a dynamic nation in the future, "Let us support the young people of our world so that they grow into adults who raise yet more generations of productive and powerful leaders." As a matter of fact it could be achieved if the young generation is accommodated by the older generation to receive proper education without violating their rights. They should have the opportunity to enter the job market and be employed for what they have achieved through their education system. Hence the decisions that the government policy makers make regarding the youth should be of prior important. If they endanger the future of them by making short term decisions, they will be bringing utter chaos to the long-term implementation and progress of the country.

The students protest in Zimbabwe has its own justifications. True that the quality of education level has to include its core skills but the literacy rate of the country is greater. The effectiveness of the educational side is not counter balancing with the economy; in fact, the learning capacities of the children are met only with the declining economic performance of the country. The Education for All Policy which was enacted by the government in 1980 made the youth more educated worsening the unemployment crisis for the educated youth in the country. It can be said that the Zimbabwe was victimized by its own success.

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