University Youths' Perceptions of Feminism in Uganda: Case of Makerere University and Uganda Management Institute

H Franklin
Makerere University, Uganda

Abstract: This study was premised on the successful implementation of policies like affirmative action in education and politics leading to a rise in numbers of women joining these sectors of the Ugandan economy. The political will has led to increased women inclusion ushering in the first female speaker of parliament and female vice president on the African continent. However, with these achievements, students looked at these as just but a drop in the ocean that does not make feminism an important part in women's emancipation. The 1980's ushered in structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) introduced by the World Bank affecting Uganda's education sector (it could no longer support the sector). This led to increased demand for higher education services with the limited infrastructure leading to establishment of over 10 private universities in the country. With such new developments, female enrollment still remained low because of reduced funding, cultural bias and no clear gender equity plan. African universities most often meet needs of male students and faculty, for instance, leadership in Makerere University is still highly masculinized with less than 04 females being Deans out of 29. These women face insurmountable challenges including lack of time to mentor the younger generation. The study utilised mixed methods with 75 respondents being purposively selected. Data was collected using secondary data analysis, interviews and questionnaires. The Key findings found out that feminism was competing with Human rights, climate change and new political waves. South Africa and Kenya have the highest number of "feminists' aware students" and Uganda (with gender sensitive policies) is still grappling with equality issues. This could impede adaptation of feminist thought amongst university youths hence promoting inequality in the society. Some of the recommendations included; increased sensitization and advocacy, redefinition of feminism to include climatic debate, human rights coupled with bringing on board the male child.

Keywords: Access, Feminism, Higher Education, Rebranding of feminism, University Students

1. Introduction

Feminism is the belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes and has been manifest in most parts of the world (Tong, 1989). There is no doubt that the feminist movement has evolved since it began in the early 1920s from women winning their right to vote to having access to education, it is no secret that the movement has made some significant strides. Despite the progress, the feminist movement has been constantly plagued with negativity because the struggle intends to create structural change of the status quo that has stood the test of time; hence meeting resistance from society. According to Tinker (1990) and McFadden (1997), fear by women of what society may perceive of them for instance, as deviants and those against the "laws of nature" has enabled inequality, discrimination, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy; stereotyping and their subordination to continue unchallenged.

In Uganda, tradition, culture, societal expectations and low levels of education largely catapulted inequality in society which according to world Bank has led to under development and failure to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). On the other side, Britain and America it has been about 100 years since women started fighting for their rights and several things have being achieved (right to life, abortion and others) while in Africa it has been less than 50 years (Kristen, 2018).

Feminism being one of the successful social movements in the world in the 20th century has also met with harshness and criticism. It has been associated with loud women as the young women in the early 2000's and 1990's were seen smashing glass ceilings, thinking of themselves as post-feminist playing a big role in the advancement of women's rights worldwide (Kristin, 2018). One can argue that, there has been achievement in education, politics, health, the economy and fight for women emancipation and rights has been strengthened (Johnson & Josefsson, 2016).

The fact that we live in a post-feminist world where society believes that feminism is dead due to the perceived equality between men and women as noted by Hall & Rodriguez (2003), means that many people believe that feminism is unnecessary, which is an untrue sentiment, because the movement still is relevant. However, challenges such as stereotyping, subordination and systematic inequality within the homes, schools, workplaces and communities still persist leading to persistent inequalities amongst the genders (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2017).

There is continuous gender based violence, for instance in Uganda 50 percent 15 to 45 year old women experienced sexual violence in 2018 while in Britain one in four women and one in seven men aged 16 to 59 years have experienced domestic abuse (Kristen, 2018; UBOS and ICF, 2018). According to CEDOVIP (2007), Ugandan society shuns men who report gender based violence, hence the low numbers of reporting or talking about their experiences. This could be seen as a reason very few young men and women support feminism because of societal perceptions (Kabonesa & Kindi, 2020). In comparison, in Britain very many young people are happy to associate themselves as feminists. For instance a 2013 Girl guiding survey, found that 35 percent of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 years were happy to call themselves feminists. In 2017, this was the case of 43 percent of 18 to 34 year old women according to a poll by Plan International or 54 percent of 18 to 24 year old women according to UM London (Kristen, 2018).

In African countries, the feminist movement is being spearheaded by Non-Governmental organizations, Schools and Universities that offer Gender and Women studies. In Makerere University there is a school of women and Gender studies which has been spearheading the movement which innovations are responsible for the diversity in the movement. For instance, more men are joining the fight for women's rights and the ever continuing fight for the Trans people acceptance in African society. According to Hooks (2000) young people (both girls and boys) world over are challenging the forces "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" with skill and style. In Europe, campaigns such as #Times up in the US and #tystnadtegning in Sweden have used stars to draw a line under sexual harassment across all industries while in Ugandan universities and other tertiary institutions, the fight by young men and women has been drawn on to sexual harassment which has been a silent killer in these institutions (Tamale, 2018). With such problems in society, feminism is an important movement to fight for the rights of the vulnerable in society (Hooks, 2000).

2. Feminist Movement on African Continent

The world over, there have been advances in feminist movements spearheading women's rights, through legalization in International and regional conventions and treaties as well as the national laws. However, this has coexisted with a patriarchal system's hostile practices pertaining to women and girls' human rights with emphasis on sexual rights (Odhiambo, 2016). Sadly, there is a belief that a feminist movement does not exist in Africa because each group pursues its own agenda ranging from abortion, sexual education to sexuality (Tong, 1989). This division coupled with Africa's conservative population is problematic to the movement. However, as Tong (1989) clearly looks at feminism it takes different forms for different women though with the difference (say of race, religion and education level) women's rights are paramount. Still, this difference highlights that feminism stands against social injustices to women and girls' and therefore solidarity must be nurtured as a value and a principle to guide actions (McFadden, 1997).

In recent years, young people have joined feminism bringing a new dynamism with emphasis on certain demands but also some tension (Odhiambo, 2016). This is vital for growth and empowerment of the feminist movement seeing they are the future feminists. According to Odhiambo (2016), integration of young feminists has emphasized the struggle for rights pertaining to sexuality bringing in a perspective that considers their specific needs and demands; their being more familiar with new information technologies will initiate other forms of communication and struggles, bringing new vigor to social networks and feminist movements. The study acknowledged that young generation feminists had different demands yet the movement needs the continuity in the struggle with empowerment and having a continuous open and profound dialogue between the generations of youths and older generation women.

3. Milestones that Feminism has Brought in Uganda

There are several milestones that have been realized due to feminism in Ugandan and these include:

3.1 Education

In Uganda, the education sector, saw the introduction of affirmative action (with 1.5 points was given to girls) which saw a decrease in illiteracy rates amongst women from 65.1 percent in the 1990's (UNESCO, 1991) to 29.16 percent (World Bank, 2020). Affirmative action in education came at a time when there were few educated women working in low paid jobs; secretaries and cleaners as men were managers and directors (Tinker, 1990). The inequality in education led to segregation at the workplace where women were relegated to the lowest paying jobs (a woman as secretary and man as a director) leading to persistent inequalities in the job market (Tinker, 1990). However in the 1990's most women went back to school and entered into the work force as managers, Engineers and in Uganda, several women rose to positions of leadership. For instance, several women were appointed to for example the head Revenue collection Department, the Roads sector, Education, Health sectors. According to Brown (2012) women bring a different brand of leadership that has charisma, empathy and understanding to it hence helping people perform more.

Further, the Government of Uganda in 2007 implemented the Universal Secondary education (USE) and Universal Primary Education (UPE) with research showing that girls' enrollment increased by 49 percent (Takashi, 2011). This number of girls in school has led to reduction in early marriages and increase in the women work force (Takashi, 2011).

3.2 Politics

According to Tamale (1998), politics in Uganda was a game for men and women have been given a raw deal by being asked questions of whether they are married or not as one of the factors to make them fit to run for office. With the introduction of affirmative action in politics where there was creation of positions for female Members of parliament, these brought more women on board. According to Johnson & Josefsson, (2016), the numbers for women increased in parliament, however the main question has been have these numbers brought change in society? One can argue that this has changed the way women are perceived in society and bringing more in the public space than before in the history of Uganda. However, this should not blind someone to the challenges women still face. For instance, a cross all political parties in Uganda, women who are the biggest supporters of politicians have been given a raw deal with a few or even none on the executive boards (Kadaga, 1999). According to Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) (2017), it has continued encouraging women to join politics and stand for positions in the political parties but women say the ground is not yet leveled for them. Political parties encourage the women to stand on "women representation seats" in the parties. Further, women have not been given the 2/3 in the parties that are highly masculine with policies that do not favour them hence affecting their representation and numbers (Johnson & Josefsson, 2016). The fact that the numbers of women are still few in mainstream politics (for example District Member of Parliament, they stand for Woman MP) could be one of the contributing factor to the delayed passing of the Domestic Relations Bill in Uganda (because of numbers).

3.3 Work

Global research clearly shows a relationship between women's role in the workplace and an increase in the standard of living (World Bank, 20001). According to the World Bank (2001), the disparities in basic rights for women like credit and work opportunities take their toll on women and girls but also impacts on the economic growth of a country. The Constitution of Uganda (1995) allows everyone regardless of sex to work gainfully and with women's rights being at the have entered into professions previously seen as masculine like Engineering, Accounting, Mechanics and others (Tinker, 1990). James Wolfensoln of the World Bank (2001) states that, "education for girls has a catalytic effect on every dimension of development with a belief that with increased educational attainment the result will be increased productivity". This is in line with research done by Gallup (2012) that states that women are better managers because they are more transformational than men. For instance, women have proved to be better managers like Jenifer Musisi former Executive Director Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of Parliament-(look at the handling of some issues in parliament).

In Uganda, the private sector has embraced women managers and leaders for instance, the Banking sector - Stanbic Uganda recently elevated a woman to become the first Managing Director appointed (see monitor.co.ug, 2020).

3.4 Family

Over the last 50 years, women were seen as the property of their fathers and later their husbands when they were married off (Tamale, 1998). Several researchers have proved that this thinking was perpetuated by the colonial system which subjugated everyone and highlighted the principle of the ruler and the ruled, the class system hence women losing out (Tamale, 1998). According to Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which Uganda ratified on July 22, 1985, the government is obliged to address the plight of women. It calls for the modification of social and cultural patterns of conduct to eliminate practices based on gender stereotypes and the calls for the implementation of affirmative action measures as a tool to combat discrimination (Uganda Women's Network, 1997).

The family being the smallest unit in society is where socialization starts from and where most cultural beliefs are perpetuated. According to Tinker (1990), society looked at women as property, who would be married off to other clans and, therefore, could not be allowed to inherit or else they take the family property to the man's family. Still, women have limited access to their children if the husbands died or in case of divorce or separation – children in most cultures are seen as owned by men and their families. For instance, in the family a woman may be given an opportunity to own property or not because of her gender. However, the constitution of Uganda (1995) provides for the right of individuals to own property (Article 26) and for affirmative action for the purpose of addressing both social and historical imbalances of which women have been victims (Article 32).

4. Theoretical Perspective

The study employed the feminist theory which has various strands, as Tong (1989) and Jones & Budig (2008) state, "feminist theories are varied and diverse but all analyze women's experiences of gender subordination, perceptions the roots of women's oppression, how gender inequality is perpetuated

and offer differing remedies for gender inequality." Further, in-order to better understand perceptions, the self-perception theory was employed. This theory was inspired by B.F. Skinner's analyses where he believed that individuals come to know or better understand their own attitudes, emotions, and other personal states mostly by concluding them from observing their own behavior or the situations in which this behavior occurs. For example, youths easily form perceptions from what social media and people around them say. In the home if the mother and sisters are treated differently from a young man he will take it that way or if a father is abusive, the children form perceptions of how it is right to have a certain behavior hence developing a self-perception which defines equality or inequality any way. Such perceptions have a huge impact on how the youth will look at life, as they either think it is not serious to take feminism as a way of fighting inequality or that they deserve whatever is minted against them, hence questioning feminism.

5. Research Methodology

The study utilised mixed research methods which incorporate elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2013). The use of this approach is being recognized because the methods answer the research questions and problem better (Creswell 2013; Tashakkori & Newman 2010). The study used combined data from a structured survey with data obtained from 14 in-depth interviews with university youths of both Makerere University and UMI. The two different methods complement each other in valuable ways by providing rich details which provide a lens to others to look at the world differently (Larsson, 2009). The study used the embedded research design because of limited resources and need for a secondary data set that emerged. This allowed the researcher to interact with the respondents in regard to what their perceptions are on feminism in Uganda.

The Data collection methods used were a survey, documentary review and key informant interviews. The study was conducted at Makerere University and Uganda Management Institute (UMI), which both accept a diverse number of students from all over the country and the world (which can serve as a generalisation for the country). However, research findings can prove hard to generalize because as the study proved the university youths reflect diverse viewpoints about feminism (Creswell, 2013). Students

were randomly selected on the campuses with the 14 key informant interview respondents selected randomly as well because of the time constraint. However, in order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomena, the researcher conducted documentary review in order to achieve higher level of validity and reliability of the findings. The documentary review was conducted in order to examine what frames other researchers have used in the coverage of perceptions of the feminist movement in the world, Africa and Uganda. Data from the survey was analyzed through assigning them to thematic areas drawn from the two main frames used in the coverage of feminist issues. Data collected from the key informant interview would be analyzed in relation to the frames used in the survey. This would serve to either affirm or negate the findings from the survey. One of the key findings of the study was that despite the acceptance that feminism seemed to have gained in Ugandan society, there was still an abundance of negative sentiment amongst university youths, which in turn could still have an impact on how the movement was viewed. Still, the researcher observed that there were more university male youths willing to identify as feminists, but felt compelled to conform to societal ideals of masculinity. According to McKay, Messner & Sabo (2000), males who conform to societal ideals of masculinity usually end up developing a sexist behaviour hence hurting the potential gains that would have otherwise been made by having more feminists (male or female) actively involved in the movement.

6. Results and Discussion

The study, which was carried out at Makerere University and Uganda Management Institute, saw 92 per cent of the students identify challenges that were blocking advancement of feminism in their institutions of learning and wider society. These included:

6.1 Stereotyping

In social psychology, stereotyping is an over generalized belief about a particular category of people (Beeghly, 2015). For instance, Ugandan society believes that women are the weaker sex, do not have to provide at home and therefore it is a job for the man to provide (Tamale, 1998). However, with the changing economic situation in the world, men are out of work at times and the woman is the bread earner. Students believe that women are the weaker sex, cannot handle sciences courses. For

instance one student said, "Women are not or do not have time and are not strong as men to take on some jobs. For instance, a few can become surgeons because it is a job that has pressure."

Such stereotypes have a profound impact on young women's beliefs and career choices in the future, as several studies suggest (Tinker, 1990, Zhang, Schmader & Forbes, 2009). This could lead to a lack of role models as Bwanga & Kabonesa (2014), also emphasize that young women do not have role models or mentors as these are not easily available. Therefore, this has led to misconceptions and understanding of feminism's importance in society. One young woman at Uganda Management Institute said, "I am not very good with research but l would like to learn from a fellow woman who has been there before me but where do l find her?"

6.2 Negative Perceptions

According to Collins dictionary (2020) negative perception is a fact, situation, or experience that is unpleasant, depressing or harmful. Sometimes these perceptions can be self-inflicted or from other people like the society, for instance a woman can sabotage their career development by underestimating themselves to manage a certain position in society or even undervaluing feminism as if it has not contributed to their development or emancipation. Ugandan students felt that women had done the work of emancipation by themselves because some even did not know that they as females were given 1.5 points to join university. The study found out that some of the perceptions that students had on feminism included;

6.3 Hardline Stance

According to the students, most of the feminists that are known in Uganda, like Maria Matembe, are loud mouthed and are seen to fight men in society. One student of Makerere University said that, "these feminists are very loud and disprove of men in society and yet if they want to achieve a lot they should work hand in hand with men."

6.4 Feminism is Women Only Fight, Not All Inclusive

The students felt that the feminists were only women fighting for women rights. 90 per cent students from Makerere University and 79 percent

from Uganda Management Institute felt that it was a lonely fight for women as men were left to believe that they were not wanted and hence the fight being at a standstill. One of the Uganda Management students said, "Women have championed the women's movement in society but it is moving slowly. If they could bring more men on board because these are the husbands, have property and networks and are influencers in society".

6.5 Feminism is Foreign

There is a strong belief that feminism is imported to Africa from Europe and will greatly negatively affect society if not checked. 10 percent of the students believe that feminism is part of the west trying to re-colonialize Africa and, therefore, cannot believe in its message. A Makerere University student said that, "when you look at the west, they are trying everything to come back to Africa, because of its mineral resources and vast fertile land, so what do they do, they think of pumping money into the feminist movement so that they advocate for more rights of women and now the fight moves to issues of women's rights and away from development and poverty." With such beliefs, feminism and women's rights are slowly taking the back seat with the fight.

Further, the feminist movement in Africa was largely funded by donors and was not an ingrown movement from Africa and, therefore, most people still feel it is. For instance, one student of Makerere University argued that, "most feminists or women rights activists are funded by NGOs and Embassies, I am yet to meet a woman in the village telling me about some issues that these feminists advocate for." According to Tamale (1998), these women have experienced the life most women have seen, for instance in politics most women running for office are still voted on the basis of who they have married, the amount of dirt they can take that is thrown on to them and how much intimidation they can take.

6.6 Feminism is the Movement Propaganda to Stay in Power

The study found out that 4 percent of the students believe that sitting National Resistance Movement (NRM) government has for long used women to win their elections and therefore feel that feminism is for the government. One student said that, "the NRM government promotes the rights of women and I think is a brilliant way of keeping power because women make up almost 60 percent of the population." This shows the perceptions university youths in Uganda have on what feminism is and means.

6.7 Competing Interests Making People Think Women Have Achieved

University youths in Uganda felt that women were better placed, because they were in positions of leadership. During the study, one Makerere University youth said that they had more than 3 female deans compared to none in the 1990's. However, according to Bwanga & Kabonesa (2014), there is a lot of bureaucracy and relationships that make all the rage in leadership at the University that, women in leadership lack. Further, these relationships have been built during the rise of one in academia through publication and trainings that most women do not have. This is because women have spent the best years having families and looking after them as their counterparts (men) are building networks which later become very important in their rise in academia.

6.8 Effect of Choice

According to Tong (1989), individual choice is important for any woman to progress in any facet of the life they have chosen. Youths felt overwhelmed by the so many things that are being thrown at them. 20 percent of the students felt that feminism was similar to human rights, global warming and innovation and did not see need for re-emphasizing. One student from Uganda Management Institute did not feel the importance of feminism with issues like innovation and ICT, global warming?

6.9 Feminism Being Sonorous with Homosexuality

Most African countries in Sub Saharan Africa have not accepted homosexuality due to their cultural and traditional beliefs hence feminism being associated with homosexuality. 43 percent of youths from Uganda Management Institute and 41 percent from Makerere University agreed that feminism was an extension of homosexuality. One Makerere University student said, "Feminism is speaking for homosexuality and therefore for me it holds no meaning at all, let them distance themselves from homosexuals then we shall listen more." Feminism is continuously being misinterpreted as advocating for sexuality only, yet it looks at issues at the workplace,

in the homes and relationships amongst people (Odhaimbo, 2015). According to Tinker (1990), strong cultural perceptions need to be handled by advocacy and lobbying with education of the masses so that these misrepresentations are corrected.

6.10 Feminism is a Fad

Feminism like human rights, global warming is a fad. 20 percent of the students thought feminism was cool like human rights and global warming, therefore, would like to identify with it. One student from Makerere University said, "I can be a feminist because it looks cool amongst my peers to be different and have different ideas. When they see you talk big they feel you are important so l think about joining the movement."

6.11 Belief that Feminism is a Homogenous Community Yet in the World there are a Diverse People

According to Tong (1989) and Tong, Sterba & Kouramy (1991), feminism is not a homogenous movement but is diverse in ethnicity and race, third world and first world. These issues, according to the young people, are not explicitly being addressed by the movement and they feel feminism is not doing enough (Shamillah, 1970). However, others feel that the feminist movement has became professional because those who work or are students in women's and gender studies programmes at their universities are the members leaving out others.

According to Shamillah (1970) there is a need to find ways to engage, and to include and retain young women from diverse backgrounds in working for social change and justice. Research from several countries has found that the homogenization of young women into categories determined by age, inexperience and status as new comers to the women's movement has sometimes worked to exclude the important contribution that they can make (Harns, 2004). While it is true that young women are currently benefitting from the gains of previous generations of feminist struggles, it is also true that the world they encounter is riddled with a complex web of challenges; including neoliberalism, fundamentalism and HIV/ AIDs (www.genderlinks.org.za, 2005). In this new global order, one may argue that feminism can provide a thorough and critical framework in which analysis of a just world is achieved. Feminists and women's movements provide the

vehicle with which to make real these visions (Harns, 2004; Shamillah, 1970).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed the university youths'/ students' perceptions of feminism in Uganda using a case study of Makerere University and Uganda Management Institute (a degree awarding institution). Considering the research and literature on the feminist movement in Uganda and the university youths' perception of the same, it is only fair and rational to appreciate the feminist movement's achievements in pursuing gender equality for the socially marginalized. Clearly, there is desire to shift towards a situation where young feminists are involved in the struggle even with the changing environment and demands they face. However, challenges of social and cultural norms, patriarchy, the new demands on the youths of unemployment, addictions are still prevalent and cannot change overnight. There is a struggle versus the "conservative elites" coupled with fewer role models for the mostly young women and men (because they are fewer and scattered in the Country and across the globe). It is also important to note that in Uganda like all African countries implementation is still a challenge and therefore, it is necessary that effective strategies; policies can be adopted by feminists and gender experts' in order to ensure that youths in universities are attracted to join the struggle. Several laws and policies like the National Gender Policy (2007), Land Policy, Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) were looked at in the study in order to understand how feminism contributed in changing some of societal perceptions of inequality. Recommendations on some reforms needed for societal acceptance of feminism's role and its fight against inequality as well as future studies around the subject are provided.

It is important to consider the laws of the land and the type of feminism in Uganda in order to strengthen the feminist movement amongst the university youths. The following recommendations can be considered:

• Role models like women in the sciences, humanities and other sectors should have time to talk with young people about feminism and its fight so that the spirit does not die off. Students felt that they were seen as they are not involved in the fight because the role models were very distant and did not take them seriously.

- Need for the feminist movement in Uganda to use social media to spread the word as most young people and students have access to media platforms like twitter, Facebook, whatsup, instagram and other platforms. The Makerere University and UMI students felt that Uganda feminist movement was not being seen apart from their knowledge of the Gender and Women studies School at Makerere University. One student said, "At Uganda Management Institute, the management is not very vocal about feminism but they appreciate women and their rights. For instance they have a nursery for the breastfeeding female population at the institute."

In Makerere University, there is Lugard Nursery that caters for the student population and the surrounding areas.

- Sensitisation is still the key to the spread of the feminist and women's rights message especially at universities. The negativity that comes with feminism as Tamale (1998) says speaks volumes. There is therefore need for continuous sensitization at universities through the media; Makerere University's Campus radio and others.

- Need to implement the Gender Relations Act in Uganda that has been shelved in parliament due to the cultural and religious differences in Uganda's society.

- Finally, according to Kakana Kanyanta, a human rights activist from Zambia, "*it requires constant education and awareness building. If we reach two to ten people, as a force we can change something in society; what we need is solidarity and to work together, without leaving anyone behind* (Habibon, 2016).

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