

Students' Anomic Behaviour: An exploratory Review on the recent Students' Deviance in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana

Cai Zhaohui & Anning Anthony Sylvester

(Associate Professor) School of Teacher Education Jiangsu University

caizhaohui@ujs.edu.cn , +86-511-88786957

(corresponding) , School of Teacher Education ,Jiangsu University

anning.tony1989@gmail.com , ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6050-601X> , +8618651403956

Abstract

This article reflected on the phenomenon 'anomie' as developed by Emile Durkheim and further elaborated by Robert K. Merton. The purpose of this paper is to review the deviant behaviour of the university students in last year October: the causes and effects of the students' action and the measures taken by government and other opinion leaders to restore tranquillity and harmony in the university. The study adopted the methodology of reviewing many media reports of the incident as it happened. The paper concluded with some recommendations to avoid future happenings.

Key Words: *Anomie; Students' anomic behaviour; Deviant behaviour; Demonstration; KNUST; Ghana.*

Introduction

It is sometimes difficult to judge human actions and inactions. Human being is complex and in his complexities exhibits some unexplained

actions. To explain human actions, sociologists normally view human actions from the perspective of the group to which that human being belongs. This paper therefore looks at the entire students' anomic behaviour (demonstration) at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana in October, 2018.

This term 'anomie' first appeared in the writings of Emile Durkheim, a renowned French Sociologist in the late 19th Century. One of these popular writings of Durkheim is his 1893 book *The Division of Labor in Society*. In this book, Durkheim revealed that the Industrial Revolution which was so prevalent rendered people to be more egoistic rather than seeking the *bene commune* of the larger community. The Industrial Revolutionists adopted division of Labor and this made people more selfish than before since the individuals sought their interest first rather than the community's interest.

The concept of anomie was further elaborated by Durkheim in 1897 in another masterpiece,

Suicide: A Study in Sociology. In this book, Durkheim discusses anomie in terms of the differences between peoples' needs and the means to achieving these needs. Accordingly, he believed that it was incumbent on the society to set limitations and also control the needs and wishes of the society's members. Without these limitations and control, members of the society cannot achieve their needs (Giddens, 1971)

American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1938) built on Durkheim's Anomic theory and developed *Structural Strain Theory*. This theory maintained that when society does not provide the legitimately significant and legal means that enable people to attain culturally valued goals, people resort to alternative means that may be illegitimate thus breaking and violating the accepted norms.

Merton believed that people without any roadmap for attaining their personal goals are more likely to cause anomie that is, resorting to normlessness. Again, in a society or institution where there is greater emphasis on ends (goals) with less emphasis on the means, there is the likelihood of breakdown in the regulatory structure, thus, causing anomie. In such institutions, there are illegitimate means of achieving goals since the institutionalized means is ineffective. For Merton, the results of anomie thus includes; delinquency, deviance and crime.

From these perspectives, social norms are very necessary to ensure tranquillity and harmony. Deviance will erupt if these social norms are loosened. There is therefore the need to always ensure that the social norms are adhered to in all circumstances. In the KNUST students' deviant behaviour (demonstration), there was mismatch of standards between students and authorities. This paper therefore reviews the students' demonstration (anomic behaviour) at KNUST reflecting on the meaning of anomie from the perspectives of Durkheim and Merton.

Emile Durkheim on Anomie

In his attempt to describe the term 'anomie', Durkheim used these terms: "derangement", "insatiable will", "malady of the infinite" (Stjepan, 1994). These terms were adopted specifically because Durkheim realised that human desire is insatiable which cannot be met but kept on increasing (Cotterell, 1999). Durkheim is believed to have revealed that anomie is caused out of a misplaced priority between an individual and/or group standards and the wider societal standards (Susan et al., 1997). Thus, too much conservatism and rigidity with little individual freedom could result in anomie. Anomie here is commonly understood as normlessness.

For Durkheim (1893), a society is said to be in the state of anomie when such society has no

accepted common values and common meanings and that many members of such society lack sense of purpose and their psychological states are preoccupied with sense of futility and that they are emotionally empty and despaired. There is no sense of striving for what is desirable among such members.

Durkheim concluded that anomie is an insufficient provision of moral direction and guidance to individuals which was as a result of tension and friction in belief systems of a society or an institution which could lead to laxity in the social ties between individuals and the society as a whole (Robert and Rokeach, 1956)

Robert K. Merton and Anomie

In the early 20th Century, Merton built on Durkheim's studies and created the Structural Strain Theory. Explicating the *Structural Strain Theory*, Merton (1938) identified five types of deviance namely: Compliance, Innovation, Ritualism, Retrogressionism and Resistance.

Conformity involves the adherence to the legitimate goals and means of attaining those goals. Innovation means adhering to the goals but the repudiating the traditional and/or legitimate means of attaining those goals. Ritualism connotes the rejection of cultural goals but the routinized acceptance of the means for achieving the goals. Retrogressionism means

abandoning both goals and the traditional means of achieving those goals. Resistance is a crucial situation where the individual abandons both goals and traditional means of attaining them but strive vibrantly to supplant both elements of the society with different goals and means.

University Education Governance in Ghana

In Ghana, there are nine public universities, nine professional institutions which have also been accorded public university status and eight technical universities and twenty private universities.

According to Bingab et al. (2016), prior to the 1991 educational reforms in Ghana, the universities were well resources by the state and also paid allowances to the students. Currently, the cost of running the public universities is a partly funded by the state and partly funded by the students whereas, at the private universities the students fully bear the responsibility of sponsoring their costs of training.

In former dispensation of university education, it behoved on the head of state to appoint both the chancellor and the vice-chancellor. However, currently, by law, the appointment of these highest offices of a public university now lies within the powers of the governing council of the university which comprises stakeholders of the university and not just the government.

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

KNUST is a public and the biggest university in the Kumasi Metropolis in the Ashanti region of Ghana in the sub-Sahara Africa. It has its origin in the plans of the then Asantehene Agyemang Prempeh I, as part of his drive towards modernization of his Ashanti kingdom. This plan was futile owing to the conflict between the Ashantis and the British as the Ashantis desired for independence from the British rule.

This vision was further pursued by King Asantehene Agyemang Prempeh II, a brother and a successor of Agyemang Prempeh I, when he ascended to the Golden Stool in 1935. Several events took place in the 1940s in the then Gold Coast during the epoch of King Agyemang Prempeh II. Among other things were the establishment of the University College of the Gold Coast. There were also the famous 1948 riots, which were aimed primarily at gaining freedom from the British and secondarily fulfilling the financial demands of the numerous pensioners. It was part of the recommendations of the Watson Commission set up by the British governor to investigate the causes of riots that a university of sciences be established in Kumasi. Eventually, in 1949, the construction of what was to be christened as Kumasi College of Technology making a dream came through for the Ashanti King began.

Significantly, there was also the need to intensify the fight for Independence. The head of State then, who is also the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, saw the need to establish a university to train and develop civil servants to replace the foreign expatriates who would eventually leave the country after Independence. This led to the establishment of Kumasi College of Technology in 1951 by Ordinance. The name of Kumasi College of Technology was changed to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) on January 22, 1952 which was the official opening of the university. Two hundred teacher training students were transferred from Achimota School to begin the new college.

However, the 1966 Revolution which led to the overthrow of Nkrumah's government saw to the change of the name to University of Science and Technology. Nonetheless, an act of Parliament (Act 559 of 1998) reverted to its original version, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

KNUST has six colleges namely: College of Agriculture and Natural Resources; College of Health Sciences; College of Humanities and Social Sciences; College of Arts and Built Environment; College of Engineering; College of Sciences and one Institute of Distance Learning. There are three Faculties under the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

These include the Faculty of Agriculture with four main departments; Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources with five departments and Faculty of Forest Resources Technology. The College of Health Sciences has two faculties namely: Faculty of Allied Health Sciences which has four departments and Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. This college also has three schools *viz*: Dental School; School of Medical Sciences and School of Veterinary Medicine. College of Humanities and Social Sciences has Faculty of Law; Faculty of Social Sciences which has seven departments and School of Business. College of Arts and Built Environment previously known as College of Architecture and Planning has eleven departments and two Centres: Centre for Settlement Studies and Centre for Land Studies. College of Engineering also has thirteen departments and finally College of Sciences has nine departments.

Currently, the university has over 40, 000 students both undergraduate and postgraduate. The university has famous halls of residence including: University hall traditionally known as *Katanga* which until now was occupied by males; Unity hall whose members are known as *Continental*s or *Conti* for short; Republic hall whose residents are known as *Moguls*; Queen's hall; Independence hall occupied by the *Spartans* as they are famously called and

African hall, popularly known as *Domites*, whose members until now were females.

The principal officers of the university are the Chancellor, Chairman of the University Council and vice-Chancellor. As of 2018, the Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II has occupied the position of Chancellor of the university.

Student Participation in University Administration

The student body have representatives, as part of their participation in the university administration, on the University Council, Academic Board, the Welfare Services Board, Faculty and Departmental Boards, Residence Committee, Library Committee and on the Hall Councils.

Methodology

This research adopted the method of gathering various media report on the KNUST students' anomic behaviour, in this case, demonstration as it happened. The various media links read by the researcher include: *myjoyonline.com/news*, *citinewsroom.com*, *Ghanaweb.com*, *Graphics.com.gh*, *asempanews.com* (these are locally based media links), *africanews.com*, *BBC Africa report* and *okayafrika.com* (outside Ghana links). This study reviewed these media report reflecting on the understanding of anomic

behaviour from the perspective of Durkheim and Merton.

Precedence of students' anomic behaviour (demonstration) in Ghana

It should be mentioned that the October 2018 incident in KNUST is not the first of its kind in the country. In a historical snapshot written by Kpessa Michael in 2007 and reported by Ghanaweb, similar incident happened in 1972 when the student leadership chastised the Supreme Military Council's (SMC's) human right records and most importantly opposed Ignatius Kutu Acheampong's proposed 'Unigov' project. The intransigence of the SMC led to students-led demonstrations in Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast calling on Acheampong, the then Chief of the State to resign.

Instead of restoring peace the government sent police and military who brutally injured most of the students resulting in the death of the then president of National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) at the time. The secretary of the union also sustained horrific injuries. The worst of all is the inhumane atrocities meted out to the students by the police and the military when they set into ablaze a statue of the head of state when they were paying their last respect to their dead president. These were pivotal moments in the relationship between national politics and student activism.

Media Report on the Students' anomic behaviour in KNUST

On Monday, October 22, 2018, almost all the media links both local and within Africa had a similar headline. Myjoyline.com had as its headline: *‘KNUST students vandalise property in Monday demo’*, Citinewsroom.com captioned *‘KNUST students to demonstrate today after colleagues' arrest’*, same headline was captioned at Ghanaweb. In other media links, the caption was not quite different. Africanews.com wrote, *‘Ghana's tech varsity indefinitely shutdown after students' riots’*, okayarica.com also had this headline: *‘Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah University Has Been Shut down Following Student Protests’*.

The Media Report Summary

The Students' Representative Council (SRC) of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) will today, Monday October 22, embark on a demonstration over what they say is the continuous unfair treatment meted out to them by the management of the university. The leaders are to hold an emergency meeting to develop a road map for the protest. The impending protest has been triggered by the recent arrest and subsequent release of some students by police in the Ashanti Region.

Some parents and guardians were furious following the arrest of about 10 students and 1

alumnus who were holding a vigil, also known as *morales* (processions of students, usually on campus, amid singing and dancing, and are very common with the all-male halls of residence) on Friday evening. This development occurred after the University's authorities had suspended the organisations of such vigils barely later.

Students gathered in support of 11 students who had been arrested last Friday night for participating in a weekly party, known as jamborees—a gathering that the vice chancellor had recently banned, claiming that the events caused "misbehaviour" and "profanity" on campus. One of the students was injured during while arrested, and students are calling for the vice chancellor to step down, BBC Africa reports.

In a statement by the executive council of the SRC, it said the demonstration has become necessary to bring an end to what seems to be the neglect on the part of university management.

The KNUST SRC Executive Council in joint forces with SRC parliamentary council and all student leaders notified all students to be part of the demonstration insisting that they should boycott lectures to prove to authorities that they have had enough of their intimidations. According to the SRC, the campus security and the police officers who were supposed to protect

them were brutalising and man-handling them, an act which they condemned. The SRC reiterated that Security personnel found guilty over brutalities will be punished. The main student body at KNUST also promised the student populace of its commitment of ensuring that security officers who manhandled students were brought to book within the remits of the law, hence students should remained calm and those affected by the incident should report to the council for their demands to be met.

The SRC called for calm from all students in the university in the wake of these rather despicable happenings as they sought justice for all affected. As the main representative body of students on campus, the SRC remained poised to exhaust all available channels to make sure all security officers found guilty are duly penalized. The SRC entreated any student who has been brutalized in any kind of way to bring to its notice their various grievances. Enough is enough, the statement concluded.

Main Cause of the Demonstration

According to the media report it could be inferred that the cause of the students' anomic behaviour is the fact that management of the university wants to change a status quo (that is, converting the Katanga hall which has been occupied by males only since the university's inception into both sexes) without the consent of

the students and that students seem neglected in this decision-making process. Thus students don't feel belonged to the school system. Again students seem to be assaulted by security personnel on campus which seriously infringes on their fundamental human rights. According to the students, the Vice Chancellor has ordered the security personnel to maltreat and molest them which are not proper.

KNUST authorities justify students' arrest

According to the media reports, KNUST management justified the arrest of some students of the University.

In an interview with Citi News, the University's Public Relations Officer (PRO), Kwame Yeboah, stated that the students did not seek permission before embarking on the vigil, an activity which has been suspended by authorities which is tantamount to gross insubordination on the part of the students.

The PRO further revealed that certain activities in the night should not be entertained. Some other activities are permitted because the students applied for permission. According to the PRO, there was no permission for last Friday's activity and that the students decided to go their own way disobeying the rules and regulations on campus. This warranted the call for the police.

The Effects of the Students' Demonstration

The purported peaceful protest turned out to be terrific and horrible. According to the media reports, the protests took a violent turn with students smashing over twenty vehicles on campus and setting ablaze motorbikes and bicycles. A school bus was also reportedly torched by the irate students. Some students boycotted classes, marched, mounted roadblocks, and some vandalized property. Eventually, classes were suspended, Vice Chancellor of the University was asked to step down.

Measures to Restore Peace

Government intervention

According to Graphics.com.gh, the government took a decision through the directive by the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) to the vice-chancellor to hand over temporarily to the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Rita Akosua Dickson as an interim measure of calming storms. Ashanti Regional Security Council (REGSEC) meeting with the university authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on the university campus with immediate effect. REGSEC also temporarily closed down the University. Following the events that led to the massive and violent demonstration by the students, the government dissolved the Governing Council of the

university. In its place, it inaugurated a seven-member interim council to run the affairs of the university for the next three months. The government requested the Chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, to lead the next steps in constituting the University Council, in accordance with the university's statute and relevant laws. The government also directed that the university should be reopened within 14 days to enable academic work to continue.

Opinion Leaders impact

University Teachers' Association of Ghana (UTAG), according to Graphics.com.gh gave a press release to support the decision taken by the government by dissolving the University Council of KNUST: "And, therefore, we support the information as contained in the release by the government and read by the Information Minister and are going to stand by it to make sure that law and order is restored on the KNUST campus and our dear students return for us to do what we love to do best."

Analysis of the Students' Demonstration

As explained by Durkheim, anomie is bound to happen when there is a mismatch between individual/group standard and the standard of system. In the case of this demonstration, the main case was that students' expectation was

not met and that tradition needs to be safeguarded; authorities too insisted different opinion, thus a kind of different standards expressed by both students and authorities. Also, Merton elaborated that there is a kind of rebellion that ensued from anomic behaviour, that is, a special case wherein the individual rejects both the cultural goals and traditional means of achieving them but actively attempts to replace both elements of the society with different goals and means. KNUST students' advocating for their own rights resorted to their own way of realising their objective after all means have been used and still no satisfaction has been attained. That which was expected to be a peaceful protest, turned out to be vandalism and injuries, suspension of lectures, and eventually temporary closure of the university, affecting its operations and its reputation both locally and internationally. At the end of the day government had to renovate the vandalised property which involves huge sums of money. Again innocent people suffered for this group action in the sense that, all the students were billed to pay some amount of money to help in the renovation of the destroyed property. This students' action drugged Ghana's name in the mud in the international front which is a bad omen for the country.

Conclusion

Students' anomic behaviours are really inimical to progress as far as this paper is concerned. However, anomic behaviour is bound to happen wherever and anytime irrespective of the circumstances insofar as human being has insatiable will. The students' demonstration is only one example of anomic behaviours. To further prevent future occurrence of similar situation and other related anomic behaviours, we make the following suggestive conclusions:

1. The Interest of Students should be incorporated into the Larger School System
2. There should be stringent measures to ensure that students follow the traditional means of attaining the school's goals.
3. The goals of the schools should not be overemphasised to the detriment of the means the means of attaining them.
4. Strong Bond and Harmony should exist between Students and School Authorities.
5. The rules and regulations should be made known to the students and the consequences of violating these rules should be clear.
6. The students should be taught the importance of social norms as opposed to individualism.

The researcher believes that with these measures in place, students' anomic behaviour could be monitored and controlled if not totally alleviated.

Limitations and Recommendations for future Studies

This study is limited in that it solely relied on media reports without hearing from any authority of the university and/or students who were involved in the demonstration. We recommend that future study could be done in other universities in Ghana where similar incident happened. No matter the repercussions of KNUST demonstration, just recently in March, 2019, similar protest happened in University of Education, Winneba (UEW), where students were calling for the removal of the Vice Chancellor of the university. Future research could be done in UEW and the outcome could be compared with KNUST and see why students' demonstration turns to vandalism of property.

References:

- [1]. Bingab, B., Forson, J., Mmbali, O., & Baah-Ennumh, T. (2016). The Evolution of University Governance in Ghana: Implications for Education Policy and Practice. *Asian Social Science*, 12(5), 147-160.

- [2]. Cotterrell, Roger (1999). *Emile Durkheim Law in a Moral Domain*. p. 19. ISBN 0804738238. OCLC 43421884.
- [3]. Durkheim, E. (1893), (Translator: Spaulding, J. and Simpson, G., 1933), *The Division of Labor*, New York Free Press, New York, NY.
- [4]. Giddens, Anthony (1971) *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [5]. "KNUST Students' Representative Council". Official Website. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Archived from the original on 27 August 2009. Retrieved 29 October 2009.
- [6]. "Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, KUMASI". Universities. Universities of Ghana Overseas Office. Retrieved 11 March 2007.
- [7]. Merton, Robert K. (1938). "Social Structure and Anomie". *American Sociological Review*. 3 (5): 672–682.
- [8]. Mestrovic, Stjepan (1994). *Emile Durkheim and The Reformation of Sociology*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Minneapolis, MN, U.S.A.
- [9]. "Our History". Official Website. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Archived from the original on 5 March 2016. Retrieved 29 October 2009.
- [10]. Roberts, A. H., & Rokeach, M. (1956). *Anomie, Authoritarianism, and Prejudice: A Replication*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 61(4), 355-358.
- [11]. Susan Leigh Star, Geoffrey C. Bowker, and Laura J. Neumann (1997), "Transparency at Different Levels of Scale: Convergence between Information Artifacts and Social Worlds", *Library and Information Science*, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
- [12]. "The Chancellor". Official Website. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Archived from the original on 29 September 2014. Retrieved 4 September 2014
- [13]. <http://www.knust.edu.gh/pages/sections.php?siteid=knust&mid=14&sid=94&id=115>[permanent dead link] History of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology |access date=2009-10-29
- [14]. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/KNUST-students-to-demonstrate-today-after-colleagues-arrest-694414#>
- [15]. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2018/october-22nd/photosvideos-knust-students-vandalise-property-in-monday-demo.php>
- [16]. <https://www.africanews.com/2018/10/22/police-military-deployed-as-ghana-varsity-students-riot/>
- [17]. <https://www.okayafrica.com/ghanas-kwame-nkrumah-university-has-been-shut-down-following-student-protests/>
- [18]. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Students-Activism-and-Ghanaian-Politics-in-Retrospect-120199>