



## **Role of the Sudanese higher education institutions in the peace building process**

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### **Abstract**

Sudan experienced a long standing armed conflict in the south between the rebels and the central government. This 22 years old armed conflict resulted in mass displacement of people of southern Sudan to the north making Sudan to have the largest numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) mounting to 4 million and half a million refugees in the neighbouring countries. Signing of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) on January 9/2005 brought the conflict to an end. However, there is a long way to go to resolve all problems which created the conflict. CPA is a major

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challenge to the civil society especially institutions of higher education in both south and northern Sudan for peace building and democratic transformation. Self determination referendum of the southern people which will take place at the end of the interim period in 2011 is both an opportunity and challenge to our country. Another armed conflict suddenly erupted in Darfur region in 2003. This time all the leaders of the conflict are newer graduates of the Sudanese higher education system. The leaders of the recent conflict unlike the southern one are young, inexperienced, and fierce. A peace agreement has been forced in by the international community in Abuja in July 2005 called Darfur peace agreement (DPA). This peace agreement has recognized the need for affirmative action to upgrade the communities in Darfur with fair share in political and economic revenues. However, only one faction of the rebels signed and a large number of the fighting groups did not sign and continued hostilities. Another round of negotiations is underway but those negotiators of the rebels do not follow any reasoning during process, on the contrary stick onto very controversial points. Another peace agreement has been signed between the government and rebels of Eastern Sudan in May 2006. The peace agreement of eastern Sudan focused onto solving political, social, cultural and economic divide between the different regions of the Sudan. The latter two agreements recognize the unity and sovereignty of the country and have no mention for self determination or referendum.

Many universities in the Sudan have peace building centers running research and activities that help Sudanese authorities and general people to experience tolerance and reconciliation. However these centers like the universities themselves are poorly funded by the federal government and hardly get external sources as they are official bodies and hence deprived of such benefits. This research is a contribution of the gender unit of the University of El Mahdi to evaluate the attitudes of students and faculties towards those peace processes.

### **Methods**

In this report we will evaluate the response of a sample of 450 students selected randomly from the University of El Imam El Mahdi which lies at the border of the conflict areas with students from all parts of the Sudan (registered students for this

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term 4500 in the bachelor program). Fifty staff members also responded to the questionnaire. The working question was whether our students are aware and can be a tool for peace building. The questionnaires were anonymous but included information about gender, whether student or teacher, the academic level of the student and his/her faculty, the education degree of the teachers. Then there are 12 questions on the different peace processes, CPA, Darfur and the eastern peace agreement. The students and staff were asked to answer the questionnaire during a class period 10-15 minutes. Data so obtained was tabulated in SPSS statistical package and analyzed to calculate frequencies and different relations.

### **Results**

Forty seven staff members and 409 students responded to the questionnaire. Male/female ratio was 4:1 in the staff group and 57.3% males and 42% females in the student group. 91.7% of the students responded to the question on Nayfasha agreement and 87.6% of the eastern Sudan. Less than half of the students (46.8%) thought that CPA was good and possible to implement, one third of them saw it was good but not possible to implement. Only 12.6% of the students saw the agreement was not good. Of the teacher group the respective figures for CPA were 53.25%, 40.4% and only 4.3% thought it was not good. Only one teacher did not respond to the question. In response to a question on the difficulties facing CPA and other peace agreements 68.7% of the students and 70% of the teachers recognized the external interference as the major obstacle for implementation. External interferences and marginalization were recognized by the students as the leading causes for the armed conflict in Darfur (39% and 36.7 respectively) while the teachers saw external influences and political conflicts as the major causes ( 57.4% and 51% respectively). Personal ambitions marginalization and tribal conflicts were also recognized as important causes by the teachers (38.3%, 31.9% and 31.9% respectively). The students gave lesser weight to tribal conflicts, personal ambitions and political conflicts as causes for Darfur problem (24.5%, 23.3% and 18.4% respectively). All the students did not answer any of the open questions such as what was their role in the peace process or whether they propose any ways of reaching lasting peace. 31.8% of the

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students and 25% of the teachers thought that the university did nothing to contribute for the peace building process. However, 20-27% of the students and teachers saw activities run by the university such as public lectures contribute to the peace building process, the majority of them think the university and IHE should play an active role in peace building and reconciliation process and in fact be integrated in the syllabi (60.7%).

**Comments**

This study has shown that students and their teachers were equally aware of the CPA and the peace process in eastern Sudan. There is more uncertainty of the possibility of implementing CPA than the eastern peace agreement. External interference is the major obstacle for the implementation of CPA and other peace processes in the country. Darfur conflict is a complex one combining external influences, political and tribal conflicts, marginalization and personal ambitions of leaders as the main causes. Students and teachers welcome involvement of the IHE in the process and strongly support integration of peace building and reconciliation in the syllabus.

**Introduction**

Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an area of 2.5 million square kilometers and nine neighboring countries. The neighboring countries are Egypt, Libya to the north, Eritrea and Ethiopia to the east, Kenya, Uganda to the south and Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Chad to the west. Those countries also share tribes with the Sudan at the respective borders (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The population of the Sudan is 35.397 million projected mid 2005 year from the census of 1993 with growth rate of 2.53% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006). There are about 570 tribes in the Sudan divided into 56 ethnic groups speaking 140 different languages which are divided into three linguistic families including Afro-Asiatic, Nger-Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan (Mohammed et al, 2006). The recent Sudan became independent from Anglo-Egyptian rule in the first of January 1956 to become the republic of the Sudan. Shortly before the independence Sudan suffered its first wave of armed



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conflicts in 1955 led by Equatoria brigade in the south. The war deprived southern Sudan any development and stability and it has been the major reason for political and military disputes until its end in 1972. That year a peace agreement was signed by the leader of the rebels and then the government of Sudan to allow a broad regional autonomy for southern Sudan and integration of the rebel fighters in the national armed force. That peaceful resolution brought improvement in the development in the south to include schools, health sector and investment in oil mining. However, in the first half of 1983 a second wave of rebellion movement started a new destructive war in the south which lasted with the signing of the present comprehensive peace agreement signed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2005 ending the longest armed conflict in Africa. This 21 years old armed conflict resulted in mass displacement of people of southern Sudan to the north making Sudan to have the largest numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) mounting to 4 million and half a million refugees in the neighboring countries.

**Southern Sudan conflict**

The present Sudan started to exist as a country in 1821 during the Turko-Egyptian rule which was conquered by Mahdi of the Sudan in 1885 (Zain Elabdeen 2007, Lagu, 2006). The country was re-conquered again by the Anglo-Egyptian rule since 1898 and since 1899 the south was considered part of the Sudan.(Lagu, 2006). Before this date in Berlin meeting 1885 the colonial forces added the south to the rest of the Sudan (El Imam, 1998). Britain instituted an administration for the south Sudan separate from the north under the rule of southern policy which closed up the south from the rest of the country in 1930. In 1945 after the Second World War and political pressures the British administration changed the southern policy and further in 1946 officially declared the south as part of the united Sudan (Salih, 2006). An important landmark in the recent history of southern Sudan is Juba conference held in August 1947 and parties from the north and south declared that Sudan should be one nation governed by federal system. Later self determination was recognized for the Sudan in February 1953 and nationalization of jobs started where the conflict started as most of the senior jobs were allocated to northern Sudanese. In December 1955 the parties in the parliament from northern Sudan promised the parties from the south of federal rule when the nation



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acquires independence and has free elections so southerners accepted the declaration of independence within the parliament on December 19, 1955 to be an independent country from January 1<sup>st</sup> 1956. The northern members of the parliament elected in 1958 failed to abide by the unanimous vote of the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1955 on a federal system (Lagu, 2006). However, long before that in August 1955 the Equatoria brigade declared disobedience and started the first armed conflict. The first resolution to the conflict was by Addis Ababa treaty which was signed in March 1972 to create a permanent cease fire and start development in the south under a wide regional autonomy and self rule. Unfortunately all that came to an end when the governor decided division of the south in three states violating Addis Ababa agreement. This uncounted action led to the eruption of a new wave of armed conflict in the south in May 1983 which continued until the signing of CPA on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2005. During this period there was great turmoil in the south and civilians had to flee war zones to be internally displaced in the north or refugees in the neighboring countries namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Congo. An estimate of four million people was IDPs and half a million refugees.

**Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA, 2005)**

This is a number of agreements and protocols signed between 20<sup>th</sup> July 2002 and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2005. CPA is composed of six chapters comprising Machacos protocol, power sharing and wealth sharing agreements, the resolution of Abyei conflict, resolution of the conflict in the two states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, and security agreements. There are two annexures to the agreements to include permanent ceasefire and security arrangements implementation modalities and appendices and implementation modalities and global implantation matrix and appendices. The most important part of this agreement is that it recognized self determination for southern Sudan after an interim period of six years during which parties agreed to make the unity more attractive. CPA is a very detailed document containing time tables for different activities, several commissions and committees assisting in implementations and resolving ensuing conflicts. Sudanese scholars identified the issue of external self determination as the most dangerous and challenging issue as it may lead to the birth



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of another poor, conflict burdened state if people of southern Sudan decide on 2011 to depart from the Sudan (Zain Elabdeen, 2007 ).

**Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA, 2005)**

Darfur peace agreement covers Power Sharing; Wealth Sharing; Comprehensive Ceasefire and Final Security Arrangements as well as the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue, Consultation, and Implementation Mechanisms. There are also a number of six annexures covering previous protocols and agreements and modalities of implementation of such protocols and these include; Agreement on Humanitarian Ceasefire on the Conflict in Darfur, Protocol on the Establishment of Humanitarian assistance, Agreement with Sudanese Parties on the Modalities for the Establishment of the Ceasefire Commission and the Deployment of Observers in Darfur, Protocol between the Government of the Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on the improvement of the humanitarian situation, Protocol between the Parties on the Enhancement of the Security Situation, and Declaration of Principles for the Resolution of the Sudanese Conflict in Darfur. The signature of such protocols and agreement continued between the government of the Sudan and the different movements during the period of August 2004 and July 2005. (DPA 2005, [www.sudantribune.com](http://www.sudantribune.com)). This agreement is negotiated within the united Sudan and does not include self determination. However, it includes a referendum on the fate of the three states of Darfur whether to stay as they are now or be merged into one region. The agreement all through respected the previous CPA and the interim national constitution which was developed as the provision of CPA. The unique feature of this agreement is the fund allocated for Darfur reconstruction and development (DRDF) to bring the region rapidly out of the war effects. Another important issue is asking for a specified percentage of 15% of the intake of the public universities in the Capital by an affirmative action to waiver some of the conditions for the intake.

**Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA, 2006)**

The eastern Sudan peace agreement was signed on June 19, 2006 addressing issues of power and wealth sharing as well as good governance. The agreement recognized



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the unity and sovereignty of the country within diversity. The agreement also touched on the need for affirmative action for developing the region and alleviation of poverty which is the main issue in this region. The agreement recognized the previously signed protocols which started since 2000. The agreement came in five chapters addressing Political Issues: Governance and Power; Economic, Social and Cultural issues; Comprehensive Ceasefire and Final Security Arrangements; Consultative Conference on Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement and General Provisions. There are seven annexures attached to the agreement to include implementation modalities and previous protocols. (ESPA 2006, [www.sudantribune.com](http://www.sudantribune.com)). In this agreement education has been given utmost care to help the region catch up with the rest of the country by instituting boarding house schools to encourage poor people go to school.

**Higher education in the different peace agreements**

The different peace agreements have considered higher education. CPA is stating on the language of instruction to be Arabic and English while polices should be a shared power between the federal government, government of southern Sudan and the states. The eastern Sudan peace agreement asked for people from eastern Sudan to be fairly represented in the managerial and governing bodies of the public universities. Darfur peace agreement stated an affirmative action with precise percentages of intake in certain public universities in the Capital. The following is the quote of this subject in DPA "Subject to compliance with admission requirements, not less than 15% of the annual intake of public universities and other institutions of higher learning in the National Capital, and not less than 50% in the case of such universities and institutions located in Darfur, shall be reserved for students from Darfur for a minimum period of ten years. Nothing herein is intended to limit other programmes designed to benefit Darfurian students."

The aim of this study was to measure the attitudes of students and teachers from the University of El Imam El Mahdi towards peace building and reconciliation efforts in the Sudan and their possible role in the process.



## **Materials and Methods**

In this report we have evaluated the response of a sample of 450 students selected randomly from the University of El Imam El Mahdi which lies at the border of the conflict areas with students from all parts of the Sudan (registered students for this term 4500 in the bachelor program). Fifty staff members also responded to the questionnaire. The working question was whether our students are aware and can be a tool for peace building. The questionnaires were anonymous but included information about gender, whether the respondent was a student or a teacher, the academic level of the student and his/her faculty, the education degree of the teachers. Then there were 12 questions on the different peace agreements, CPA, Darfur (DPA) and the eastern Sudan peace (ESPA) agreements. The students and teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire during a class period of 10-15 minutes.

## **Statistical analysis**

The data was coded and entered into a data base created by SPSS statistical software. Frequencies were recorded and different associations were calculated by Chi-sq test and p values <0.05 were considered significant.

## **Conflict of interests**

There was no conflict of interests between the authors. The students and teachers voluntarily filled in the questionnaires and some of them returned unfilled forms without any consequences on their rights to learning and freedom of choice. The data was only accessible to the authors and was used only for the purpose of this study.

## **Results**

Forty seven staff members and 409 students responded to the questionnaire. Male/female ratio was 4:1 in the staff group and 57.3% males and 42% females in the student group. 91.7% of the students responded to the question on CPA agreement and 87.6% of the eastern Sudan. Half of the students (51.2%) thought that CPA was good and possible to implement, one third of them saw it was good but not possible to implement. Table 1 and figure 1 show the opinions of the students on CPA according to

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their sex. There was a significant difference between the views of the males and females concerning CPA applicability where more females saw that it was good and possible to apply ( $p$  value 0.029). Only 12.6% of the students saw the agreement was not good. Of the teacher group the respective figures for CPA were 53.25%, 40.4% and only 4.3% thought it was not good. Only one teacher did not respond to the question. In response to a question on the difficulties facing CPA and other peace agreements 68.7% of the students and 70% of the teachers recognized the external interference as the major obstacle for implementation. The views of the students on ESPA are shown on table 2 and figure 2. The majority of the students saw ESPA a good agreement which is possible to implement (69.6%) and there is no significant difference between males and females in this respect. Whether the students are from the arts or science based disciplines has its bearing on the views of the students. More students from arts based colleges see CPA as good and possible to implement than students in the science based colleges and the differences were significant ( $p$  value= 0.001) (Table 3). The arts and science students had similar views about ESPA (table 4). External interferences and marginalization were recognized by the students as the leading causes for the armed conflict in Darfur (39% and 36.7% respectively) while the teachers saw external influences and political conflicts as the major causes (57.4% and 51% respectively). Personal ambitions, marginalization and tribal conflicts were also recognized as important causes by the teachers (38.3%, 31.9% and 31.9% respectively). The students gave lesser weight to tribal conflicts, personal ambitions and political conflicts as causes for Darfur problem (24.5%, 23.3% and 18.4% respectively).

Teachers when asked for their views on how CPA can be sustainable they responded by wide views which can be summarized in loyal and true respect for the peace agreement, advocacy, involvement of the whole community and all parties in implementation. They talked about avoidance of external influences by strengthening national NGOs, strengthening infrastructure and contacts. Advocacy for peace culture and having patience in that is needed.

For Darfur conflict also the views ranged from suppression of external influences, fair and balanced development, fair sharing of wealth, and involvement of



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the entire nation and its political parties in solving the problems. They also look forward for Darfur-Darfur dialogue and all nation conference that can suppress personal ambitions, tribal and racial divide. Repatriation and settlement of IDPs appeared clearly in the views.

Most of the students answered the open questions such as what was their role in the peace process or whether they propose any ways of reaching lasting peace. They gave views ranging from avoiding external influences, focusing on education and fair development share to all regions, institution of democratic rule and entire nation reconciliation. 31.8% of the students and 25% of the teachers thought that the university did nothing to contribute for the peace building process. However, 20-27% of the students and teachers saw activities run by the university such as public lectures contribute to the peace building process, the majority of them think the university and Institutions of Higher Education should play an active role in peace building and reconciliation process and in fact be integrated in the syllabi (60.7%). One teacher thought it would be better to teach peace related issues at the basic and secondary school levels rather than at the university level.

### **Discussions**

This short study has proven that university students and the staff are possible tools for peace building and reconciliation in a country torn by armed conflicts like the Sudan. Both male and female students can play crucial roles in the community when properly directed. The data when analyzed showed high awareness of the problem among the students and the teachers. However, there are some differences as how females and males perceive the resolutions of the conflicts on the ground. There were significantly more females who see that CPA is good and possible to implement than males, showing more optimistic views. The overall optimism of the success of CPA is low as only 51% of the students believe on it due to the external influences and competition between politicians. Another interesting element is that art based discipline students were significantly more optimistic about the success of the process than the science based disciplines. However, only students from the first year were present in the art based disciplines to respond to the questionnaires possibly adding to the increased



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optimism. This part needs to be verified when greater numbers of students stratified by their year numbers in the university are studied. The worries of the students and teachers about the applicability of CPA are shared by the Sudanese scholars who found self determination a dangerous sign in this agreement (Zain Elabdeen, 2007, Salih, 2006). The students believed ESPA is a good agreement and it is possible to implement. There is no difference between male and female in this response and likewise arts and science based disciplines were all similar in their views. DPA seems to be a dilemma to the students and teachers. The students believe that external influences and marginalization are the main causes. The teachers agreed with the students that external influence is the main cause but the second cause being the political conflicts between rival parties in the region. Personal ambitions have been recognized also a major cause beside the others and this is clear in the shattering of the rebel groups due to personal ambitions of field leaders. Fewer females are represented in the teacher group. However, there is no difference in their opinions towards CPA, ESPA and DPA. The degrees of the teachers seem to influence their response as those with higher degrees masters or PhD were more optimistic towards the solutions founded by CPA. The open ended questions were difficult to analyze. However, quotations from these responses showed the readiness of students and teachers to act as tools for peace building process and reconciliation at the community level. They chose public lectures and different kinds of advocacy as the best tools to bring the message to the community. The students and teachers wanted peace building to be integrated in the syllabi of higher education. A wild opinion of a teacher did not recommend teaching peace issues in higher education but to be taught early at the primary and secondary levels of schooling. Students and teachers saw that both men and women play a role in the peace process which marks the gender awareness and feeling of equity among our university community.

A Sudanese scholar recognized the natural disasters of draught and desertification leading to scarcity of resources as the major cause of Darfur conflict where deeply rooted tribal traditions led to armed conflicts especially between farmers and animal herders (Ali Dinar, 2006). UN Environmental Programme sees the armed conflicts in Sudan and specially Darfur is due to environmental erosion with



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desertification and overgrazing degrading the remaining land. UNEP see the way for solution of conflicts is on rehabilitation of the environment by actions and activities costing about \$120 million/year for several years (UNEP 2007).



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Table1. The association between sex and the student opinions about the comprehensive peace agreement

	Good and can be executed	Good and can't be executed	Not good	P value Chi sq
Male n= 219	107 (48.9%)	73 (33.3%)	39 (17.8%)	-
Female n=158	86 (54.4%)	59 (37.3%)	13 (8.2%)	-
Total n=377	193 (51.2%)	132 (35%)	52 (13.8%)	0.029

Table 2. The association between sex and the student opinions about Eastern Sudan Agreement

	Good and can be executed	Good and can't be executed	Not good	P value Chi sq
Male n= 214	154 (72%)	33 (15.4%)	27 (12.6%)	-
Female n=146	96 (66.8%)	29 (19.9%)	21 (14.4%)	-
Total n=360	250 (69.4%)	62 (17.2%)	48 (13.3%)	NS

Table 3. The association of students' opinions on CPA according to whether they are from art based colleges or science based colleges

	Good and can be executed	Good and can't be executed	Not good	P value Chi sq
Science based n= 280	128 (45.7%)	103 (36.8%)	49 (17.5%)	-



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Arts based n=96	65 (67.7%)	29 (30.2%)	2 (2.1%)	-
Total n=376	193 (51.3%)	132 (35.1%)	51 (13.6%)	0.000

Table 4. The association of students' opinions on ESA according to whether they are from art based colleges or science based colleges

	Good and can be executed	Good and can't be executed	Not good	P value Chi sq
Science based n= 266	177 (66.5%)	50 (18.8%)	39 (14.7%)	-
Arts based n=93	73 (78.5%)	12 (12.9%)	8 (8.6%)	-
Total n=359	250 (69.6%)	62 (17.3%)	47 (13.1%)	NS

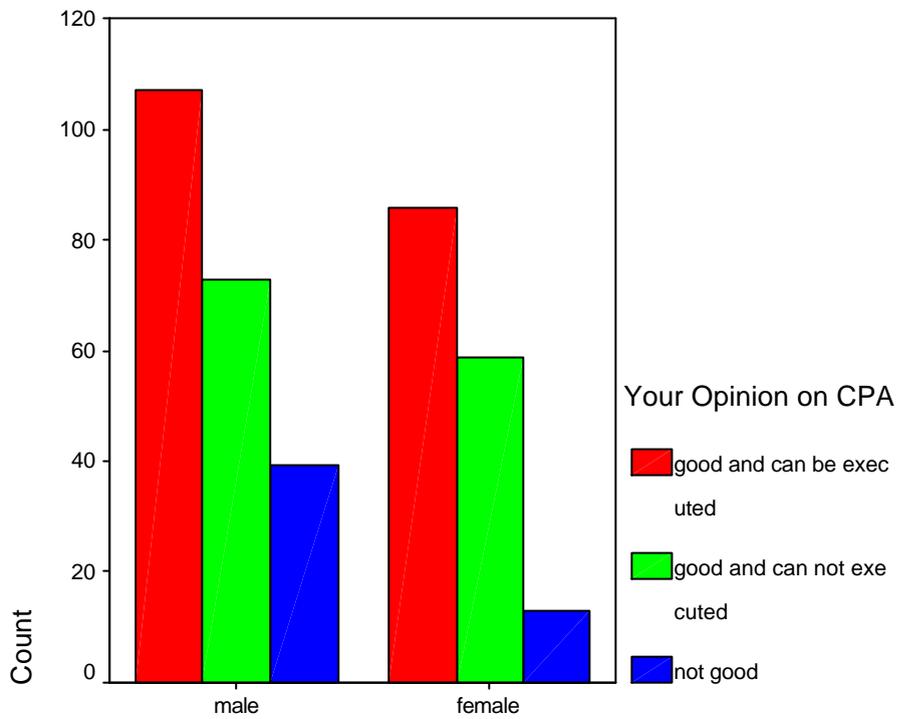
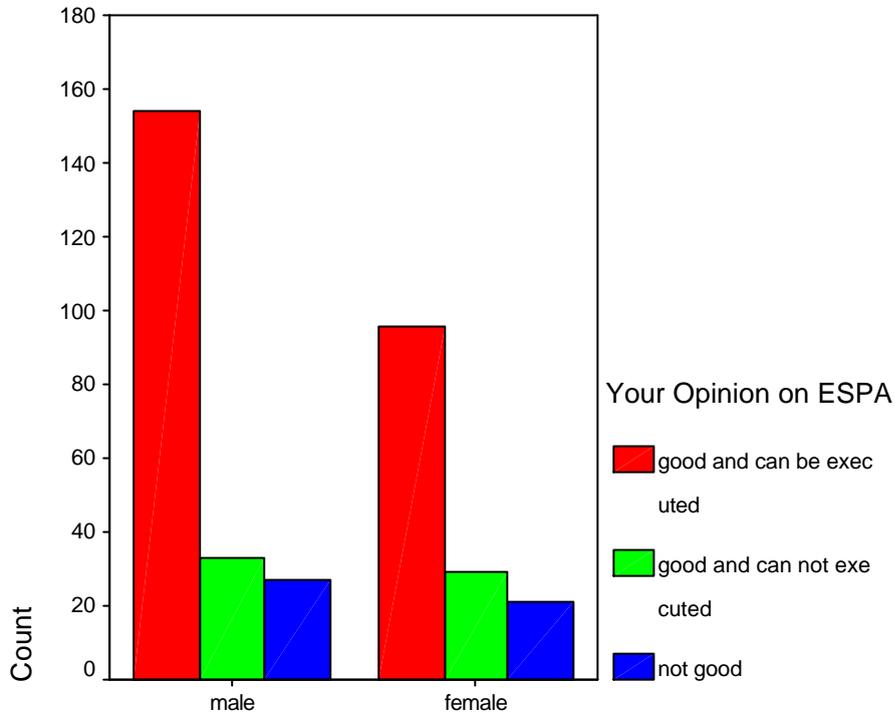


Figure 1: Students' opinions on CPA.



Figures 2: Students' opinions on ESPA