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Transformative Approaches to Managing Student Unrest in A South African University

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Abstract: Higher education and training institutions in South Africa have experienced widespread student unrest and crises in recent years, particularly within universities. This issue has been attributed to strained relationships between students and university management. Therefore, it is imperative to address the conflict gap between students and management in order to promote peaceful university operations. This study employed qualitative research, utilising decoloniality theory and a transformative paradigm lens within a qualitative research approach and participatory research design. Data was collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), with participants selected using a homogeneous sampling technique. For this study, three management employees, three students (SRC members), three lecturers, and three security officers from the chosen university were selected as participants using the homogeneous sampling technique. Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis. One of the key findings is that the lack of a proper structure to manage unrest and the failure to involve students in decision-making pose significant challenges in the management of student unrest. The potential solutions to these challenges include the establishment of appropriate structures, the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes, and the development of common ground among stakeholders. These solutions could effectively address the issue at hand. Furthermore, a major recommendation is to engage society in order to address student unrest comprehensively. The study concludes that applying principles of openness and integrity is crucial in building and maintaining trust among stakeholders, as trust has been identified as a significant factor in bridging the gap between them.

Keywords: Managing student unrest, decision-making, decoloniality, university stakeholders, student involvement.

1. Introduction

Higher education and training institutions in South Africa have experienced a surge in student unrest and crises in recent years (Stuurman, 2018). This phenomenon is not unique to South Africa, as it has also affected higher education systems in other countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, and the United States (Omodan, 2019; Uyanga, 2016). Stuurman (2018) posited that significant challenges have plagued South Africa's educational system since 1994, such as the admission of students to higher education institutions, the high cost of tuition, issues of inequality and discrimination, and the limited availability of on-campus housing.

In 2015, students took drastic measures to express their frustrations by taking to the streets, often resulting in unrest and large-scale crises. These students were committed to addressing the issues and ensuring equitable access to free, high-quality education. This led to the emergence of the Fees Must Fall movement in 2015, which caused the temporary closure of most universities in South Africa (Langa et al., 2017). According to Archer (2017), South African universities, along with the broader higher education sector, faced immense pressure to transform their policies and practices as a means of rectifying historical injustices experienced by marginalised students and academic staff during the

oppressive era. This pressure ultimately forced South African universities to shut down as students demanded decolonised, accessible, and transformed education.

It is acknowledged that the most marginalised students who were previously deprived of access to education and are unable to afford tuition or housing outside of hostels are the ones most affected by these challenges. Others face barriers to admission and are unable to benefit from government grants, while some students are excluded from university education entirely, leading to discontinued studies (Insight in Higher Education, 2009). Consequently, previously disadvantaged individuals find it difficult to recognise and realise their potential, resulting in growing frustration (Choundhary & Hindi, 2018). In 2017, the Qwaqwa campus of the University of the Free State temporarily shut down after 27 students were detained following a confrontation with law enforcement authorities. The university further exacerbated students' anger by provisionally deregistering all enrolled students pending approval from the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (Bloemfontein Courant, 2017).

This issue is not unique to UFS. North-West University (NWC), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), University of Fort Hare (UFH), University of Zululand, University of Pretoria (UP), University of Cape Town (UCT), and other universities have also recently experienced protests that resulted in the shutdown of their campuses (Mutekwe, 2017; Mavunga, 2019). As a result of the prolonged duration of these unrests, institutions are often forced to expedite academic work. However, this raises concerns about compromising the integrity, productivity, and quality of education within these universities. This stands in contrast to the argument that quality is the most important factor for higher education to achieve its objectives (Singh, 2017).

From the above argument, it is evident that these unrests must be addressed and minimised. The management of these institutions can accomplish this through effective crisis management tactics. According to Najib (2018), one approach to managing student unrest is the development of strategies that foster unity among stakeholders, wherein shared goals and responsibilities are embraced, and campus management assumes a proactive role. Moreover, Murage, Njoka, and Gachahi (2019) highlight the importance of involving student leadership in the management of higher education institutions as a key strategy for preventing riots and unrest. Student leadership contributes to participatory democracy and enhances students' control over these institutions. This study aims to address the primary issue of the strained relationship between management and students that underlies the ongoing instability in South African universities, as mentioned earlier.

Based on the preceding analysis, it is evident that efforts should be made to rebuild the relationship between university administration and students. Consequently, a project aimed at improving convergence between these two critical stakeholders is necessary to foster collaboration and enhance productivity for the benefit of all.

1.1 Research problem

The study is motivated by the fact that South African universities occasionally face disruptions or have to suspend operations when students raise concerns with university administration. Institutions like Walter Sisulu University (WSU) had already been experiencing these issues before the Fees Must Fall campaign swept through South Africa in 2015, although other universities may not have acknowledged or discussed them. For instance, WSU temporarily halted operations in August 2013 due to employee protests over salary demands (News24, 2013). On many occasions, students would also protest by locking down the campus after their demands were denied by the administration. Consequently, students from various colleges across the country have expressed concerns about the prevailing management culture, believing that the management is not adequately addressing these issues and that the perpetrators of these actions often go unpunished. A major consequence of these disturbances is the loss of property and, at times, loss of life or injuries (Mjema,

2013; Adeyemi, 2009). In order for the university management and stakeholders to engage without disrupting the learning process, it is essential to bridge the gap between students/stakeholders and the management. This gap calls for the application of decoloniality theory as a framework to understand the student unrest in universities.

1.2 Theoretical framework

This research will be guided by decoloniality theory as the theoretical framework. According to Ncube (2019), this theory is primarily concerned with challenging the way in which reasoning is upheld, as it aims to expose and oppose long-standing colonial circumstances. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), decoloniality seeks to challenge the modern social order, which is maintained through teachings and epistemologies that perpetuate the marginalisation and alienation of Africans, who are socialised to disdain the very Africa they are a product of, and to aspire to be like the Europe that rejects them. In other words, the theory aims to reject Western ways of thinking and doing things in Africa, deeming African ways as unworthy. Both our curriculum and management styles are heavily influenced by the West, which is why there is a growing call for decolonisation. According to Joseph (2010), considering the lack of progress in transformation, decoloniality must be adopted as a substitute. This is because previous attempts to transform various aspects of the university, such as the curriculum, fees, staff, and requirements, have been unsuccessful, hence the pressing need to shift from transformation to decoloniality.

This theory is relevant because, among other factors contributing to unrest in our universities, there is a strong demand for decolonised education. Therefore, this theory will serve as a foundation for understanding what decoloniality entails in terms of social issues and how it influences people's thoughts and actions in a collective context. This theory will help in managing the conflicts between students and university authorities by decolonising the management approach. Based on the aforementioned discussions, the theory will reshape students' thinking by encouraging them to believe that they can be heard through constructive means rather than resorting to demonstrations and property destruction. At the same time, it will assist management in recognising students as adults who should be involved in decision-making processes regarding their education and its structure rather than imposing an education system that may not meet their needs. Through this theory, management and students can better understand that they are essentially seeking the same goals, albeit through different approaches.

1.3 Research objectives

This study seeks to augment the management of student unrest prevalence in South African universities to ensure these institutions' smooth functioning. Accordingly, the following research question was employed as a pilot for this study:

- Examined the challenges associated with the management of student unrest in the university system.
- Highlighted possible solutions to reconstruct the relationship between the students and the university authorities.

2. Methodology

This research embraced a transformative paradigm, which is highly pertinent as it seeks to explore and address power dynamics, societal injustice, and cultural intricacies. This makes it particularly suitable for studying student unrest in South African universities. According to Mertens (2007), the transformative paradigm focuses on these critical issues, ensuring that the research not only identifies the root causes of unrest but also seeks to empower marginalised groups by involving them in the research process. This approach aligns well with the participatory research design, which emphasises collaboration with participants and ensures that their voices and perspectives are integral to the study. By utilising participatory methods, the research fosters a deeper understanding

and mutual respect between students and university management, ultimately aiming to create sustainable and equitable solutions to the challenges faced. This combination is relevant because it not only investigates the issues but also promotes active involvement and change, which is crucial for addressing the complex and entrenched problems of student unrest.

The research approach adopted in this study was the qualitative research approach. According to de Vos, Strydom, Founch, and Delport (2011), a research approach is the plan that the researcher uses to carry out the study, including the decisions made throughout the process. Creswell la. (2016) concur with this definition, stating that a research approach is a method that moves from philosophical presumptions to the specifics of how the researcher will select participants or subjects, what method will be utilised for data collection, and what method will be used for analysis.

The study employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a data collection method. Focus group discussions are grounded on the hypothesis that there is a wide range of responses, assistance with forgotten information, and a platform for participants to freely disclose information that they may not share at a personal or individual level (Maree, 2016). The research utilised focus groups to collect data, using a homogenous sampling strategy to select participants who have similar experiences related to the study's research problem. For this study, three management employees, three students (SRC members), three lecturers, and three security officers from a university in South Africa were chosen as participants using the homogeneous sampling technique. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants for ethical reasons and to protect their identities. These participants contributed to the generation of the collected data. Consent forms were issued and signed by all study participants to ensure informed consent for participation and publication of the research. The consent process was thoroughly explained to the participants. Most importantly, the study was ethically approved by the University ethics committee with protocol number: UFS-HSD2020/1347/2610/21.

Thematic analysis was employed as the method of data analysis in this study, which is one of the methods commonly used in qualitative research. According to Braun and Clarke (2014), thematic analysis is defined as a method by which patterns of themes are identified and structured to provide insight across a set of data in a systematic and organised manner. Thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows the researcher to interpret and understand data in various ways, and it is not limited to one theoretical perspective (Marguire & Delahunt, 2017). This method is relevant because it enables the researcher to analyse the data flexibly, according to the objectives of the study, without significant restrictions. It also allows for the identification of the challenges faced in managing student unrest and possible solutions. The results are discussed below.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, I presented the findings derived from the collected data. These findings are analysed in light of the study's aims and four objectives. The primary aim of this research is to enhance the management of student unrest prevalence in South African universities, ultimately ensuring a peaceful educational environment and promoting productivity. The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to examine the challenges associated with managing student unrest in the university system, (2) to identify potential solutions that can help rebuild the relationship between students and university authorities, (3) to explore the necessary conditions for successful implementation of these solutions, and (4) to investigate potential obstacles that may hinder the implementation of these solutions. To accomplish these objectives, we employed a thematic data analysis method to analyse the data collected. Through this analysis, themes emerged, and these themes formed the basis of our discussion. Lastly, we deliberated on possible solutions based on the identified themes.

3.1 Objective 1, theme 1: Lack of proper structure to manage unrest

Universities occasionally experience unrest, and it is evident that they still lack an effective method of managing and controlling such unrest. It seems as though they are caught off guard by these

incidents. The existing literature has revealed that the causes of student unrest are common issues, yet new issues continue to arise, surprising the university as a whole. The management of this unrest often involves militarisation, which entails the deployment of police officers who, at times, pose a threat to the safety of students, as well as the involvement of private security companies. Rather than employing reasoning and engaging with all stakeholders, the handling of student unrest tends to rely more on threats. It is claimed that many incidents of student unrest that occurred throughout the year were novel issues. These issues have been exacerbated by the absence of proactive planning in relation to the management of unrest. The following statement from a participant supports the aforementioned argument:

> **Mxolisi Alleged that**: "*The university knows very well so that next year February our academic calendar is beginning and they know very well that NSFAS will come on board at a much later stage, so, therefore, you cannot expect that err these people should come here for an entire two months hungry, these people should come here the entire two months without books, it is an issue. So I believe that with the preparation, we could see a lot less of protest because they have done it before.*"

> **Siyabonga pointed out: "***Basically, I feel if the management communicates with students, management should be proactive, to prevent things from happening before they happen, instead of being reactive.*"

As an institution of higher education, universities should anticipate and address student demands through the utilisation of research. The aforementioned allegations suggest that the university is reacting to student unrest, which often leads to delayed responses and further unrest. If universities had proper mechanisms in place to manage unrest, instances of unrest would be minimal. Unrest is inherent in a democratic institution, and effective management would entail minimising and mitigating disruptions, including property damage. Murage et al. (2019) support these arguments by asserting that the effective administration of student affairs in public universities remains a significant challenge for administrators and student leaders worldwide.

This indicates that structures exist to manage student unrest, but their effectiveness is not ideal. Conversely, Mavunga (2019) argues that the administrative shortcomings of vice-chancellors were exposed during the #FeesMustFall protests, as many struggled to balance allowing protests on campuses with ensuring the safety of employees, students, and infrastructure. Participants have acknowledged that management tends to be reactive rather than proactive, often responding to issues only after unrest has occurred, particularly when it is disruptive. The following statement from a participant supports the aforementioned argument:

> **Mxolisi also alluded that:** "*in most times management here acts only after there's been protest and I am saying this because errr 2019 there was an issue when the allowance was not reflecting and students were hungry, and they then went to protest DH was looted ant thing was burnt, someday around six or nine the money came into the accounts, and it then raised a question as to say so do we now need to always engage in this manner for something to happen.*"

The aforementioned arguments put forth the notion that universities in South Africa, both rural and urban, lack adequate and efficient structures to manage student unrest. In fact, it appears that university management relies heavily on threats and the militarisation of campuses. This perspective is supported by Mavunga's (2019) statement, wherein newspaper articles reported that certain universities exerted their authority by hiring private security firms to protect campuses, utilising legal measures to prevent student protests on campus, and, in some instances, resorting to threats and disciplinary actions against protesting students. These actions can be viewed as various strategies implemented by university authorities to gain control over the unrest. Furthermore, the

university possesses power over student leaders, particularly as they are partially employed by the institution and receive stipends, making it easier to exert influence over them. The following statement from a participant offers further support for the aforementioned argument:

> **Lubabalo shared this view: "***Looking at the composition of the student structure, which is the SRC, the student structure gets hired by the same institution that they are fighting against, so who has the power in that case? Is it the same institution that hired you? Because now they want to intimidate you at some point, and it's easier for them to do so.*"

The argument presented above demonstrates that universities have the ability to intimidate members of the SRC when they are financially supported by the institution, which compromises their freedom. This affects not only student leaders but also any students who participate in protests. University management often subjects them to such treatment, although it is more commonly applied to the SRC. To support this claim, Omodan (2021) argues that the deployment of security forces by the university administrations, such as the Mobile Police and military, during protests is seen as authoritarian and inhumane. Instead of implementing proper systems to address student unrest, universities rely on intimidation tactics. This aligns with Mjema's (2013) earlier suggestion that university administration resorts to authoritarian techniques, including intimidation, to manage student unrest.

3.2 Objective 1, theme 2: Failure to involve students in decision-making

University students perceive themselves as independent adults who should not have decisions made for them but rather be included and consulted in decision-making processes, particularly on matters that directly impact them. According to Omodan (2021), decision-making is a crucial aspect of organisational management, encompassing an intricate process. Additionally, it is contended that exploring various potential courses of action is inherent in the decision-making process, especially in crisis management. Consequently, in a university setting, decision-making should not be solely delegated to managers but should involve all stakeholders within the system. Hence, the frequent conflicts between university administration and students often stem from decisions being imposed on them without adequate consultations. Students assert that they are seldom included as stakeholders in the decision-making process, leading to resistance when decisions appear to be against their interests. This assertion is supported by the following statement from a participant:

> **Lubabalo shared this: "***Definitely let them know of what you are doing, how you are expecting them to be involved in the institution and what the value of their contribution within education, it's not only about, higher education is not only about you coming and getting your certificate, is about shaping your career, it is about shaping the vision you have, and so forth you know.*"

> **Mohau alleged: "***So we exist as prefects and reps because we are expandable and disposable.*"

In simple terms, it is essential for students to be informed and engaged in order to align with the ideas and objectives promoted by the university. By involving students in decision-making processes at all levels, conflicts can be minimised as everyone is kept informed, and there are no surprise outcomes. Chiluba (2019) suggests that conflict management is another effective approach to controlling conflicts, which can be applied before, during, or after a conflict. This approach encompasses conflict resolution and transformation, and it involves establishing long-term partnerships with institutionalised rules and processes for resolving disputes. It aims to resolve conflicts, prevent crises, or de-escalate conflicts when they arise. Furthermore, this approach helps students feel acknowledged as stakeholders and valued for their contributions. Participants have expressed discontent with their role as student representatives, feeling more like prefects than stakeholders. They are often given instructions without being involved in decision-making, leading

to hostility towards management and their decisions. The following statement from a participant supports the aforementioned argument:

> **Bongiwe emphasised this**: "*Some decisions are taken at the main; how do you expect someone in a different place to take a decision on a place they've never been to and expect them to give a decision favourable to students.*"

This decision is made by students who are enrolled in the extension campus of the selected university. However, there is a general sentiment that the decision-making body lacks knowledge about the circumstances they are deciding upon. Naturally, students do not take such matters lightly. Between 2001 and 2007, the South African Higher Education System underwent a reform process that involved the merging of universities, technikons, and colleges. It is important to note that the extension campus, which was later fully incorporated into the University of the Free State, originally functioned as a satellite campus of the University of the North. Despite the incorporation, students claim that they do not feel fully integrated into the university merger. They feel neglected and believe that decisions are made about them without considering their perspectives. They also expressed a lack of familiarity with the university management that is responsible for engaging them in decision-making processes. According to Singh (2017), the classroom should serve as a tool for nation-building by teaching students about democratic processes, allowing them to make their own decisions and advocate for themselves. In a democratic country, student involvement in decision-making processes is considered essential.

There have been allegations that student unrest was also driven by student political influences and differences. The Student Representative Council (SRC) has stated that even unrest leading to the burning down of a student lab and clinic was not orchestrated by the SRC itself but rather by students acting independently. It is further alleged that student leaders affiliated with political organisations not currently in charge of the SRC may instigate actions that undermine the current SRC's effectiveness.

3.3 Objective 2, theme 1: Development of proper structures

During the discussion with students, it was determined that the university heavily relies on external security to manage student unrest. This reliance on private security companies can pose problems, particularly when their interests directly align with an increase in student protests. It has been alleged that relying on these companies has a detrimental effect, as they can also be perpetrators themselves. Therefore, in order to create a safe environment for both students and staff, it is crucial that security personnel receive comprehensive training, especially in crowd control. According to Langley (2018), university administrators may view the first signs of unrest as an opportunity to deploy law enforcement measures to maintain peace. However, students may perceive this as oppressive and a justification for even more aggressive retaliation.

The militarisation of campuses should not be seen as a viable strategy, as students can interpret it as a provocation. Instead, if universities can utilise their own properly trained security personnel, students are more likely to understand and have a pre-existing relationship with them. Omodan (2021) indicated that the deployment of security forces by school administration during protests, such as the Mobile Police and military, is seen as authoritarian and lacking in humanitarian values. These perceptions contribute to students resorting to coercive tactics to assert their demands and protect their rights, especially when they view the university administration as their oppressor and feel marginalised, mistreated, dehumanised, colonised, and oppressed. The following participant statement further supports the aforementioned argument:

> **Mxolisi shared this view: "***One way to manage unrest is through our securities, they must train these ones here with crowd control, and we cannot err run with our securities. The securities they run as well. When there is a protest, they run away, and this opens an*

> *opportunity for PSCs, these private securities companies (PSCs) year to come here. And one's really, it defeats my logic to say you'll bring someone with a vested economic interest to solve a problem that makes them money."*

The statement affirms that universities are enlisting the assistance of law enforcement and private security firms due to the insufficient training of university security personnel in crowd control and management. Consequently, this paves the way for the militarisation of our campuses, potentially exacerbating the problem of unrest and exploitation. Students react unfavourably to the introduction of external forces onto the campus, exacerbating the situation beyond what is necessary. Ideally, universities should be able to depend solely on their own campus security without requiring excessive reinforcements, which can sometimes result in chaos. The subsequent statement from the participant supports the aforementioned argument:

> *MRs: "Orientation, students must be taught the right approaches in making their opinions heard, that violence is not answered to anything, especially not things or properties that benefit them most. Again, the place of educating students cannot be neglected."*

University is an institution of learning. As the suggestion mentioned above indicates, students must be taught the proper practices that the university expects from them. Upon entering the university, they should be educated on how to engage in peaceful unrest, if necessary, and they need to be familiar with the proper channels to do so. Additionally, participants also encourage the integration of students by providing more than just orientation events. They suggest implementing programs specifically designed for new students. The statement from the participant further supports the argument mentioned above:

> **Mxolisi**: "*After preparation, they must be prepared to also integrate high school students to the university; ask the university what program have you done for the high school students, besides the orientation, because orientation is just one thing err one day even to talk about whatever to play whatever games, but what have you done to integrate them to show them that this is a different environment and this is how we operate. Because we are coming from the same communities where protest is the order of the day, we are coming from very poor communities where you only see a drop of water once you've gone, err block the bridge somewhere or burned a clinic somewhere. We come from communities where protests is officials is the only language they understand, but now they are in a different space."*

This statement confirms that people come from a society that has come to believe that in order to be heard, they need to take to the streets and burn things. To eliminate this mentality, the university must, therefore, teach students about democratic principles. Najib (2018) suggests that in order to address various challenges, higher education institutions must promote learning at personal, institutional, and societal levels. Consequently, leadership development training programs should be an integral part of all higher education institutions (HEI). This indicates that these efforts extend beyond the university campus.

Onivehu (2021) states that university students may participate in demonstrations on a variety of subjects, whether directly related to the university system or urgent societal issues and the broader community. Once again, society and current issues come into play. In other words, society directly or indirectly influences the frequency of student unrest. For example, this rural campus is located in a small town that is constantly affected by unrest due to various demands, and students inevitably learn from this environment. The environment itself has an impact. Therefore, the university should not stand idly by. Those who come to the university must be properly integrated in order to unlearn what they have learned from society.

3.4 Objective 2, theme 2: Involvement of stakeholders in decision-making

Decision-making plays a significant role in fostering relationships between stakeholders, as mentioned earlier in this study. Previous findings indicate that one of the main concerns raised by students is their exclusion from decision-making processes. Therefore, in order to address student unrest, it is crucial to involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process, ensuring that their perspectives are taken into account. Amongst these stakeholders, students must be included. According to Murray (2018), many colleges have started implementing sustainable policies and practices to promote sustainability; however, they face numerous challenges in achieving success. While the reasons for this lack of progress are subject to debate, scholars agree that the engagement of campus stakeholders, particularly students, is vital for achieving positive outcomes. The following statement from a participant supports the aforementioned argument:

> **Tata:** "*Collaborative ways of doing things in diverse groups representation of both students and management and other structures dealing with all issues; or dedicate a team or have a unit for unrests with diversity where all groups are represented may have a better way of managing it might have an impact.*"

The above point emphasises the importance of involving all stakeholders in addressing the issues that are causing unrest within institutions. This includes individuals who have a vested interest in the matter. Students have long been advocating for representation and their interests to be considered. Effective collaboration among important organisations is crucial in establishing relationships with the local community, external organisations, and internal colleagues and implementing leadership strategies (Najib, 2018). Sikweyiya and Nkosi (2017) observed that a significant aspect of addressing public unrest involves engaging with stakeholders and state leaders in public institutions, which may explain why men are more visible or encouraged to take leadership roles. The research also highlighted the significance of empowering and involving faculty and student leaders through collaborative leadership. Furthermore, forming alliances with external organisations proved to be vital. The following statement from a participant supports the aforementioned argument:

> **Officer 3:** "*Whenever there is a problem, the SRC must take the demands from the students, and the SRC must meet with the management. Management must meet all the stakeholders, including security, and set a meeting with the different departments. To find strategies to solve that particular problem, in order to control it so that it doesn't get out of hand.*"

The prevailing idea is that the unrest of all stakeholders can be managed. It is important to note that stakeholders include not only management and students. Onivehu (2021) supports this idea by stating that effective communication techniques, stable tuition rates, student participation in decision-making, and good leadership behaviour can reduce student unrest. Singh (2017) suggested that while full participation in Students' Union events is not mandatory, most students choose to participate, and students play a crucial role in shaping the country's policies. Therefore, the student union opposes any government decision that is not in the best interest of the general welfare and advocates for policy change.

This demonstrates that for the development of harmonious policies within the institution, student involvement and acceptance are essential. As customers, it is vital that policies prioritise the interests of students above all else. Luescher-Mamashela (2011) proposed that when students participate in decision-making, it promotes transparency and builds trust among all parties involved. Involving all stakeholders, including students, in decision-making helps resolve many issues because everyone is informed about what is happening within the institution. Oni and Adetoro (2015) argued that involving students in decision-making encourages them to fully embrace the decisions made rather

than rejecting choices imposed by management. This, in turn, helps to calm them down as they feel that their interests are being considered.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude this project, the study findings were examined in relation to the factors that contribute to unrest, namely the lack of a proper structure to manage unrest and the failure to involve students in decision-making. It was concluded that these two challenges are among the issues that fuel unrest in rural universities. The development of effective structures and the engagement of stakeholders in decision-making were identified as potential solutions to rebuild the relationship between students and university authorities. It was revealed that addressing these challenges appropriately could help prevent unrest in the higher education sector. Furthermore, the study findings indicated that implementing these strategies could save universities from the significant costs associated with unrest. Therefore, it was concluded that unrest could be avoided by implementing these revealed strategies. Throughout the discussion, the importance of inclusive principles and effective communication among stakeholders has been emphasised, as this is crucial for establishing and maintaining trust, which has been identified as a key element in bridging the gap between stakeholders.

5. Declarations

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