Managing Violent Student Protests in Tertiary Institutions for Peace and Conflict Resolution in South Africa. The case of Central Johannesburg College-Alexandra Campus

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Abstract: The current study sought to explore the effectiveness of conflict resolution initiatives adopted by key actors to curb student violent protests in Central Johannesburg College-Alexandra Campus. South Africa remains in a volatile form with peace remaining highly elusive and one such indicator is the rising level of plunder and vandalism, shootings, stabbings, and other violent crimes within the education system. Deprivation theory which believes that when people are deprived of things considered to be valued in their society, they tend to join social movements with the expectation of getting their grievances rectified. The second theory which was used is the Frustration and Aggression theory which believes that aggression is the consequence of hindering, or frustrating, somebody's attempts to achieve a certain goal. The research focused on 60 students and 10 student union leaders. Convenience sampling was used to select 5 college administrators. The research used focus group discussions and structured interview guide as data collection instruments. Findings have shown that various initiatives had been employed by the key players in managing violent protests at Central Johannesburg College and these included dialogues and engagements, safe space concept, promotion of student participation in college governance as well as intimidation and arrest.

Keywords: Conflict, conflict management, peace, peacebuilding, violence.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, South African institutions of higher education have been hit by wave after wave of student protests. Inevitably, different actors have recommended a number of conflict resolution initiatives to mitigate these violent student protests. This study therefore sought to analyse the effectiveness of these initiatives assigning particular emphasis on Central Johannesburg College (Alexandra Campus). It is important for the education key players to have a deep understanding on how student conflicts are managed and to be skilled on how to solve disputes conflicts because competent skills in conflict management have been known to encourage improvement in social and academic achievement in short term and a more harmonious environment in long term. According to Blake and Mouton, (2014) education leadership should know what conflict management contains and should be competent in the area in order for them to be effective in their schools. Unmanaged disputes can lead to violence and dysfunctional institutions which can also impede the quality of education. A wide scope of literature has highlighted a number of ways used in resolving conflicts in the tertiary institutions, however, there is little research and literature focusing on the effectiveness of the adopted conflict resolution intervention measures and this is the gap which this study wishes to cover.

BACKGROUND

The African continent has had its share of youth violence, particularly in higher education institutions. On a positive note, athwart the continent, African students have left an indelible mark as being one of the influences that brought about Africa's 'second liberation' in the 1990s (Mazrui, 1995). For that reason, vital macro-political and macro-economic issues have concerned student protestors who have taken it upon themselves to use protests as a means of expressing their disapprovals on the status quo of issues relating to the right to education, social justice, democracy and self-determination (Mazrui, 1995). According to Joseph, (2016), university student community members have a predominant characteristic, most of them are young people. Joseph, (2016) considers social class, cultural and genre statuses and explains that these aspects simply mean that there is not just one type of youth and both different types of youth without end have in mind social, political and cultural transformations implicit in the setting they interact in. Violence by young people is, according to Anderson, (2019) one of the most visible forms of violence. Both fatal and non-fatal assaults involving young people contribute greatly to the burden of premature death, injury, disability, loss of property and debilitation of the African education systems.

Moreover, if one has to direct the lens locally in South Africa, it is beyond doubt that school violence is a cancerous epidemic. Plunder and vandalism, shootings, stabbings, and other violent crimes have not spared either the public or private learning institutions (Baker and Goesling, 2012). A report by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR 2018) suggested that only 23% of South African learners said they felt safe at school. Of much significance to this study is the 2015-2016 violent behaviour displayed by tertiary students across the country as they protested against payment of fees and the use of Afrikaans as a teaching language. These protests persist despite the fact that since 1997, the Higher Education Act has been revised almost every year to afford the Ministry of Education grip on higher education issues (Hall, Symes and Luescher, 2002). The National Plan for Higher Education sought to reform the complete setting of higher education so as to create a complement of new institutions through consolidations and mergers. For instance, the Afrikaans-medium Potchefstroom University was merged with the English-medium University of North-West. This was one initiative on transformation of the higher education by the South African government.

In 1994, the South African government adopted a higher education system awash with racial divisions and disproportions. The universities and technikons (technical colleges) were envisioned by the apartheid's system to establish different and imbalanced educational opportunities across four main racial groupings. This was further worsened by the divisions drawn between English and Afrikaans medium of instruction, and by ethnic division, with bodies established to serve in name only independent native land (Bunting, 2002; Cooper and Subotzky, 2001). Deliberations on the most effective ways to transform this system were initiated through the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1996 (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013) and the White Paper and Higher Education Act of the following year, (Department of Education, 1997) and ended in a National Plan for Higher Education in 2001 (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). All these initiatives by the Ministry of Education demonstrated some form of commitment in the transformation of higher education institutions. There was also the Institutional Forum, a specifically South African governance institution representative of major groups of stakeholders and formed by the 1997 Higher Education Act. The Institutional Forum

consists of representatives of students, support staff, management, academic staff, Senate and Council, as well as external stakeholders. Luescher-Mamashela, (2013) argued that the idea was borrowed from the Broad Transformation Forums which were part of the South African public higher education institutions in the 1990s whose purpose was to give legitimacy to institutional decision making. The Institutional Forum, however, doesn't have any decision-making power of its own but has a key role to play in advising Council on issues related to the transformation of higher education and affecting the institution. These include among many others, the implementation of national policy, the recruiting of senior management candidates, and race and gender equity policies.

Methodological Prima
The approach followed in this study is qualitative descriptive research methodology as it enabled the narration and interpretation of nature/extent of the effects of conflict resolution initiatives in tertiary institutions in South Africa. This approach was appropriate to this study as it enabled to establish the nature and even the effectiveness of conflict resolution initiatives being used. A total of 70 participants took part in the study. Focus group discussion and structured interview schedule were used to collect data from the students, student union leaders and university administrators respectively. The collected data were presented in graphical forms (graphs and pie charts) and in tabular form. Verbatim responses from open-ended questions were captured by themes and qualitatively interpreted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Deprivation Theory
Development of the model of deprivation is ascribed to an American sociologist Robert K. Merton. The theory believes that when people are deprived of things considered as valued in their society, they tend to join social movements with the expectation of getting their grievances rectified (Abraham and Grant, 2015). In agreement, Garisson, (2016) explains that the theory of relative deprivation is founded on the conception that people are most likely to feel deprived of their desires in relation to their own past, other similar groups or other social categories. Whereas Abeles, (2016) defines deprivation theory as real or supposed lack of resources required to maintain their livelihood quality or to persons to which those groups would have become habituated and

are reflected to be the accepted standard within those groups. The Deprivation theory served as a beginning point to the research in looking at why student join protests in the first place. Merton, quoted by Abraham and Grant, (2015), believed that people join social movements based on their assessments of what they think they must have, in comparison with what their peers have. South African students have been known for organising mass joint movement dedicated to improving the quality of their education, protests about demanding low accommodation and tuition fees,

quality accommodation, educational inequities and policies amongst other things. It can be noted that relative deprivation could be one of the causes of student protests which have in most cases turned violent. Additionally, the deprivation theory states that, "improved conditions fuel human desires for even better conditions and so can spark revolutions" (Abraham and Grant, 2015:16). A person is considered as deprived if they are underprivileged in materialistic or immaterial manner.
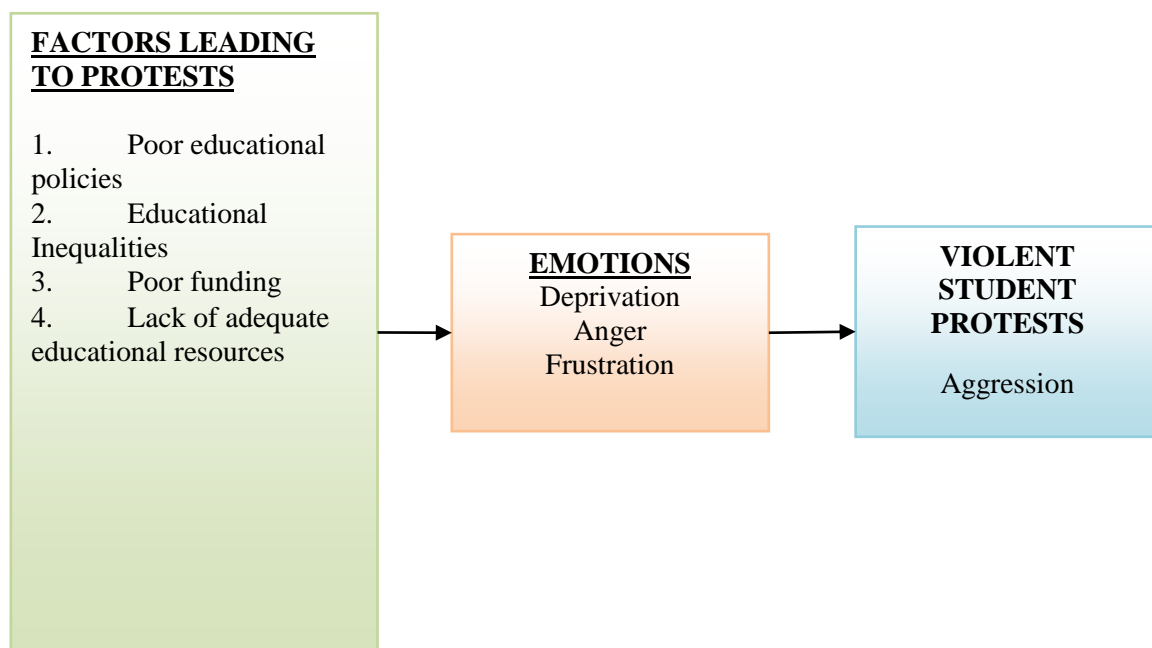
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

FACTORS LEADING TO PROTESTS

1. Poor educational policies
2. Educational Inequalities
3. Poor funding
4. Lack of adequate educational resources

EMOTIONS
Deprivation
Anger
Frustration

VIOLENT STUDENT PROTESTS

Aggression

Fig 1: Development of the model of deprivation
Designed by authors

RESULTS

The results of the study primarily from the interviews which were conducted with the students, student union leaders and administrators at Alexandra Campus. Considering the qualitative nature of the study, researcher had to look for key

words and phrases in the open ended questions to capture that data. Participants in the students' category were coded as FDGS, student union leaders as SUL and administrators as AD.

Demographic Information

Table 1: Gender and Level of students

College Level	Female		Male	
	Frequency	**%**	**Frequency**	**%**
2nd Year	9	30	8	26.7
3rd Year	16	53.3	18	60
4th Year	5	16.7	4	13.3
Total	30	100	30	100

In the female category, the majority of participants (53.3%) were 3rd year students, this was followed

by 30% who were 2nd year students and lastly 16.7% who were 4th year students. A similar

pattern in the male category was noted as the majority of the students (60%) were 3rd year students, 26.7% were 2nd year students and the remaining minority or 13.3% consisted of 4th year students. This trend could be due to the fact that at the time in which the study was conducted the highest number of students at Alexandra Campus in Central Johannesburg College were 3rd year

students. Student transfers from other campuses and drop outs could be the reason for this. The researchers ensured that there was equal distribution of gender amongst respondents which were half split between male and female students. Having equal gender representation ensured that the researchers could have different views from participants with different needs and backgrounds.
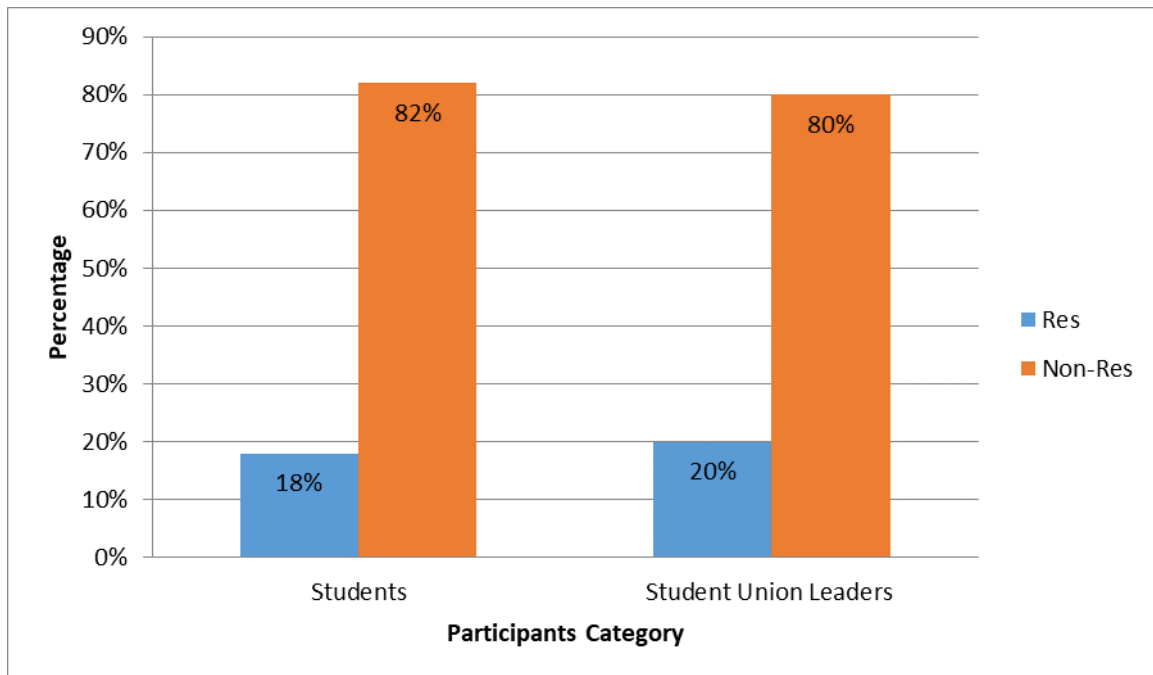

Fig 2: Student residence

Student residence is part of student life and the researchers sought to find out the residence of the students who participated in the study. In the above Figure 2, it is shown that the majority of study respondents were not residing within the Alexandra Community.

Conflict Resolution Initiatives Being Utilised By Key Players in Managing the Violent Protests at Central Johannesburg College

Findings from the focus group discussions showed that there had been several initiatives by the institution to manage violent student protests. However, the group participants indicated that these efforts implemented were not student centred because the institution authorities were mainly concerned about the image of the institution. One concept that was being used by the institution is the concept of safe space in the college.

The Concept of Safe Space

One term that continued to be raised during the discussion was 'Safe Space'. It seems this term has been used by the institution to stifle the diversity and protest attempts by the student. Alexandra Campus administration had turned the concept of

Safe Space against student protests. This issue as raised by the students, student leaders and the key informants and their input is directly quoted below;

"*The institution uses the Safe Space mantra and claim that student protestors make the staff members scared and intimidate other students who want nothing to do with protests. This is used to suppress our right to protest.*" FGD2

The above response indicates that this student was arguing that the culture of Safe Space at the college encroached and denied the freedom of protests by the students. It could be that the safe space idea was being carried too far. Other interesting views from two student union leadership were as follows;

"*We get surprised when, in our last attempt to demonstrate, we were dispersed by the security personnel with the help of the police and the institution authorities claimed that we were violating other people's right to a safe learning space. These are poor protest management techniques by such a big institution.*" SUL3

"*When convenient, institution administrators declare protests unfit for the institution's safe space and they have a tendency of exploiting this concept and depriving us of our rights*." SUL6

The respondents quoted above all argue that the purported creation of a safe space in the college serves only to stifle freedom of speech and protest. The safe space idea was originally meant to create an institution where everybody, students and educators would be insulated from violence. However, the concept seems to now serve in hindering the rights of students to protest and have their voices heard.

"*Educational institution have been perceived as places for ideas to be challenged yet at the same time they are also meant to be environments where everybody feels safe and comfortable. Violent protests do not allow that, which is why we try to enforce the culture of safe space in the institution*." – AD1

Although there is an element of truth in the above, such statement from the college leadership could be a censorship which prohibits freedom of protest. Another statement with a similar ring to it was noted by AD2 and is as follows;

"*When it comes to the issue of safe space, it depends with who you are because some students abuse it. Safe space means that the college must be open to all student matters, but then not all issues must be heard in a public setting and through demonstrations that is why we have dialogue platforms. Everywhere in the world freedom of speech is limited to a reasonable period, place and manner. A manner which must not encourage each other to violence. Protests do that and hence they should be avoided*" – AD2

Safe spaces should empower the students to speak up and provide them with the space and time to give their opinions. The above response however could mean that not all students entitled to a safe space as some took advantage of it. In the responses obtained from the students, student union leaders and administrators it can be noted that the concept of safe space was not fully contextualized by all parties. The South African law realises the concept and at the same time accommodates the right to protest and freedom of speech. As such protest may only be lawfully prohibited when reliable information on oath is brought to the attention of the responsible authorities that the proposed gathering will result in serious disruption of traffic, injuries; or extensive damage to property and that the South African Police Service (SAPS) might not be able to contain this threat.

Informed Discussions and Engagements between Key Stakeholders

Consultations and engagements were mentioned by the administrators as one of the conflict resolution initiative used to manage violent protests at Central Johannesburg College. However, all administrators interviewed stated that students had unrealistic engagement expectations which then presented some challenges in effective communication and reaching mutual ground. The actual statement from AD1 was as follows;

"*Unrealistic demands from students cultivate some hostility by institution leadership and even the government itself. As a result, even their ability to reasonable engage forward are undermined then discussions get dismissed prematurely*." – AD1

Effective communication between stakeholders provides a foundation for preventing and resolving conflicts. It is a mechanism which encourages the development of values, attitudes and knowledge between the students and the institution. The study then sought to find out if there was a conducive environment for conflict resolution engagements. The actual question was, '*Would you say there is a conducive environment for peaceful consultations between the students, institution and state?*' Findings obtained showed that there was lack of such as the students felt that the environment was not conducive.

The following statement was raised by one student;
"*We have experienced increasingly harsh and violent policing and intimidation tactics from their campus security services, punitive suspensions, bizarre bail conditions and mass arrests after protests. They are failing to do anything properly, which is why others end up protesting aggressively.*" – FDGS19

In line with this sentiment, Amber, (2018) postulates that when procedures feel rigged it is no wonder why people resort to action outside governance structures. It is important for the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology to adopt a bottom up approach by sitting and engaging with students on their own terms in their own spaces. The majority of students indicated that they desired better representation of

their views and opinions and that they were willing to positively engage with the authorities.

The same question was also addressed to the interviewees, there was a convergence of views with the students and their union leaders. The administrators felt that the manner in which they handled disputes and conflicts was appropriate and effective. AD3 had the following to say;

"We do what is best for the students and the institution. The problem is that they (students) try to earn support from media and CSOs (Civic Society Organisations) through violent means because they know that when they engage with the institution properly, they might not get the attention or publicity and in some cases the funding that they want. I believe that is why they choose violence and hooliganism."

The above is an emotion filled and strong statement which the researcher probed further with the student union leaders. It was noted that there were some organisations who funded activist students.

"... We do have some funders in the CSO sector but that does not mean they fund for violence. Instead the purpose of funding is to enable the students to meet their requirements for activism and advocacy purposes." –SUL3

The findings showed that informed discussion was used as a conflict resolution strategy by the institution. AD2 stated
"Dialogue is done with the parties who have a potential conflict about a certain issue. It involves engaging the disputing parties in information and perception sharing and to help reach common ground by sidestepping obstacles to resolving conflict or to engage in agreement building processes."

However, this statement was disputed by the students,
"The institution has to ensure independence of the students; some administrators use their power of influence to direct engagement processes. This clearly displays the lack of sincerity in resolving the disputes. It should not work that way." – FDGS1

SUL5 said;
"*There is need to start exploring the meaning of democracy in our institutions and with meaningful involvement of the students in key decision-making. This form of governance will hold the government officials and senior leaders accountable as well as to enable them to make decisions that the communities are invested in.*"

After probing further, the researcher noted that the Central Johannesburg College had been recently changing its policies regarding the most recent student demonstrations. The government has also fastened its laws on student protests. Student activists must seek approval from their institutions before holding protests under the policy. This law was criticised by the student union leaders during the interviews as they felt that the new policy was restricting freedom of speech and making peaceful demonstration more difficult.

Student Participation in Institution Governance
Administrators and students mentioned that the students took part in institution governance as a method of ensuring inclusive development so that their needs are met. However, the students displayed lack of content on how their participation had any impact. The factors affecting student participation in institution were categorised and presented in a quantitative format below.
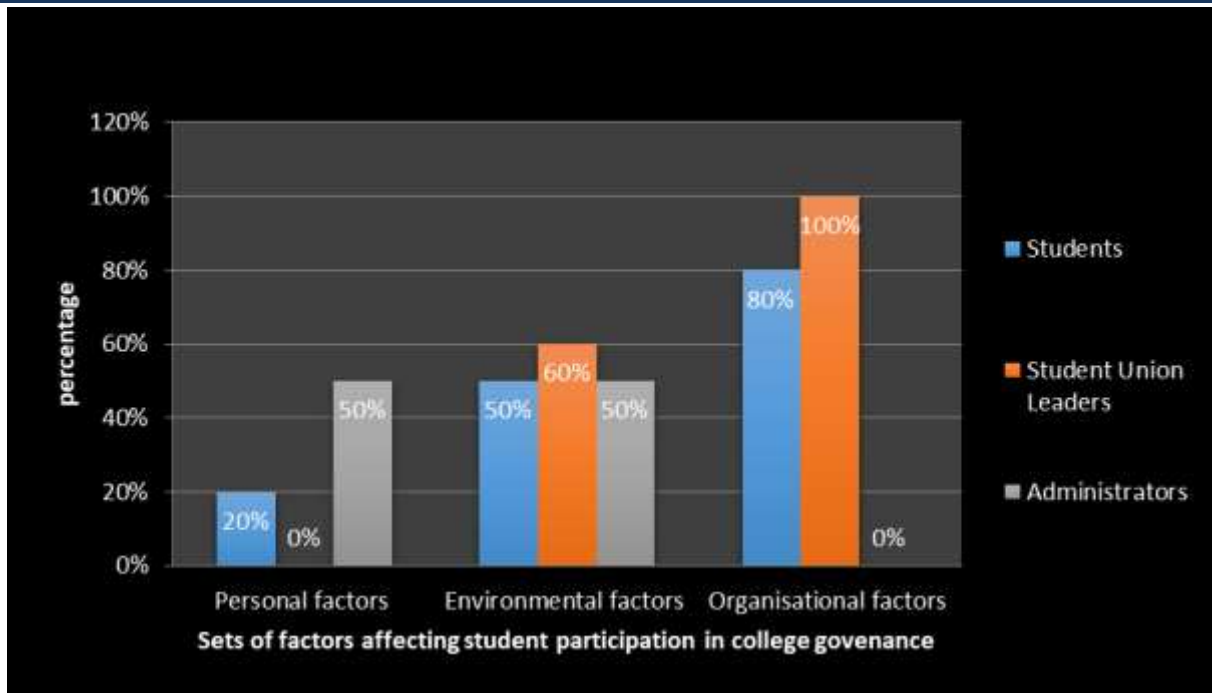
Fig 3: Sets of factors which affect student participation in governance

Personal Factors

Administrators mentioned individual factors as elements which discouraged students from being pro-active when it comes to governance of Alexandra Campus. AD2 stated that the degree of personal maturity, age and interpersonal skills of students determined whether they participated. Also, students mentioned during interviews that older students distanced themselves from college politics whilst the younger ones were more active. Another key reason for lack of participation by students was described as follows;

"*My key reason for disengagement with student activities is because there was a time I found myself unable to uphold all of my commitments and balance activism with my academic priorities.*" – FDGS30

The above response indicates that being too busy with studies could be amongst the barriers to student participation in college governance activities. The interviewees felt that these were some of the disadvantages preventing the students from being effective participants in decision making.

Environmental Factors

Findings showed that the most prominent environmental factors were political and economic aspects which exist in the community. According to AD1,

"*South African politics is a very sensitive matter and this affects the manner in which students*

perceive participation in college governance. Our campus is located in a very polarised and sensitive community. This makes them feel that if they participate in college governance they would be associated with certain political parties. Those who say they don't belong to any political party prefer to stay in the terraces and not be part of college governance." - AD1

The above response confirms that student participation in institution management and governance was heavily influenced by the local economic and political situation.

Organisational Factors

Organisational factors were found to be the main culprit in affecting student participation in college governance issues. The highest ranking decision making body at Central Johannesburg College is the Board of Governors. This Board is responsible for decision making with regards to the college budget, operational affairs, college provided services and determines the college curriculum. The following response was raised by one administrator;

"*Student union representatives sit on the formal decision making committees of the college taking part in university policy making and in administering college affairs including student affairs.*" – AD2

Further probing however, indicated although the student extensively involved in the provision of student-related services, there were no student

representatives who sit in this board, but rather they sat on lower ranking committees as campus/branch level. Also the following responses indicate that their sitting in committees was not effective because it was ceremonial.

"College leadership and Officials from the Ministry are birds of a feather. They do come and address student meetings, talk to student occupiers, and generally speak for the government. However, I still feel that they want to dictate things to us rather than engaging with us and this does not make our problems go away because we want to be heard and contribute in the development of resolutions to the problems at hand." - FDGS33

In agreement FDGS37 had the following to say;
"Guys from the Ministry like to look as if they are working even if they are not. I say this because we all know that they effectively dialogue with us until we reach a mutual understanding because most of them do not have credibility and sympathy with us. Some are not even willing to get into a direct dialogue and they have a negative attitude because they think they know better."

Such an emotional statement revealed the negative relationship between both the college institution and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the students. In response to the above sentiments, one administrator noted;

"Students are involved but there is no impact because our contributions are not listened to. They just involve us in order to make us think that we are really participating when in actual fact we are not. We try to negotiate and make deals with the student leadership and at times we negotiate the rules governing the pending protests in order to minimize the groups that wish to pursue a more violent forms of protest or demonstrate behaviour that would in ordinarily be unacceptable. We really try by all means to engage and keep the channels of communication with protesting students and their leaders" – AD2

The above findings indicate that the interviewee was well aware that students should contribute to the governance of the college presenting information and perspectives, sharing knowledge and understandings, and arguing strongly for student interests. Yet however, their participation was absent on the high ranking institutional governing body. It seems from the findings, that students had the least influence in decisions at this level hence they could not exert much influence

over the decisions of the college because of their relatively-weak representation. Students and their union leaders believed that students as the clients of the college have a right to take part in making decisions which influence them or their studies and hence the college leadership needs their input in decision making. The college management has a responsibility to facilitate student participation in college decision making since student involvement not only ensures representation of student interests.

However, an administrator also noted that the governing board members believed that the primary role of students is to study and therefore they should not be encouraged to be full-time politicians. His exact statement was as follows;

"Students do have a voice in college facilitated debates and surveys and their views are heard through such platforms and addressed. Frankly, there is not really much need for them to be full time politicians because their core objectives is to attain education. Besides you will notice that it is mainly the young ones who lack experience, maturity and knowledge in such matters who are the activists." – AD1

This could be one of the reasons why students were excluded from standing in the highest governing executive board at institutional level. Administrators explained that the reason is because certain decisions were sensitive ones which involved personal and confidential information.

Intimidation and Arrest
A significant number of students echoed the same sentiments when they explained that they indeed had rights to peaceful protests on their campuses but then freedom after partaking in the protests was not guaranteed.

FDGS7 had the following to say;
"Students must have the right to peaceful protest on their campuses. But then after protesting one can be expelled or suspended without due procedure..."

Such a response reveals the breakdown of college procedures for consultation. The students said that rather than responding to legitimate student demands, the Central Johannesburg College authorities were trying to quash the voices of the next generation and yet they should be listening to their concerns, not silencing them.

Another interesting response was obtained from FDGS16 as follows

"Sometimes they target the leaders of the protest in order to sabotage them from happening. What they forget is that the threat of arrest and intimidation by the police does not solve problems and does not deter us from protesting again until they hear us."

Protest is a way of influencing when all other avenues have been shut down, therefore it needs to be recognised as being legitimate and requires universities to listen to students and staff and come to a compromise. During the interviews with the administrators, it was noted that students may participate in peaceful demonstrations on campus during non-instructional periods. Moreover, the administrators felt that students may exercise these rights as long as their speech, expression or conduct is not offensive and does not incite students to destroy property or inflict injury upon any person, or does not cause substantial disruption to the operations of the school. However, one student had the following to say;

"A few years back we had a protest against poor education standards. The police were called and they attacked use with tear gas and high pressure water cannons. I feel this was excessive force which violated our right because the protest was a peaceful one." – FDGS9

The presence of the police during peaceful protest is in itself aggressive. This could be an escalator of conflicts in protest which then end up being violent. Students expressed that the police had long being using different underhanded tactics to target protesters and activists.

"The police abuse the criminal justice system to criminalise protesters for exercising their right to protest. Many of us have been arrested for frivolous and unfounded charges of public violence; illegal protesting even though they have met the requirements, attending an illegal gathering and trespassing. Since when did attending an illegal gathering become a criminal offence?" FDGS21

"The police are very good in frustrating and intimidating people who protests. They manipulate the system such as bail procedures. Previously, protest leaders have been charged with public violence. Funny enough, these charges are very often dropped after a few months of postponements and frustration on the part of the protesters" FDGS30

In agreement to the above notion, other students echoed that the leaders of the protest are usually targeted. However, rather than stifling the protest and cause of the protestors, this leads to violence. In unison, students echoed that police are the causers of violence during student protests.

Disciplinary Hearings

It was noted that the colleges used disciplinary hearings as a strategy to handle violent protests. The interviewees echoed the same sentiments when they stated that students in their institution had previously faced unfair arrest and suspension by the institution. Although the administrators agreed that punishment has been used to control violent protests in their institution, they also agreed that protesting was a democratic right for the students which helped to improve governance and management of the institution. AD1 stated the following;

"In my experience as an administrator, I can safely say that student protest politics is to be cherished and that it is important for students to be given a space to really express what they believe in and stand for while growing up in a learning environment. Of course this does not detract that these protests may get out of hand and elements within the student groups may want to resort to violent behaviour. Hence, it is important that they are managed and peace prevails. We do this by involving law enforcement agents and trying to engage in meaningful dialogue"

This response emphasises on the need to set up a safe space for students to protest, or to work with local officials to find a safe space for student protests.

Responses from the students are stated below;
"You will realise that a few targeted students are singled out and suspended leaving the others. The institution itself fails to work in accordance with its own policies. Also the provisions on how we can challenge such decisions are not clear in the college code and policy document" – FGDS4

"Besides the fact that punishing people for protesting is abusing their rights, the manner in which disciplinary hearings are done is not clear or fair at all because you will find that people are called for disciplinary hearing before the protests even start. I mean how do you know that the demos are going to be violent before they even start?" – FGDS5

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The above findings indicate that disciplinary procedures have been used to substitute for dialogue. Monroe and David, (2019) argue that administrators should be accountable when things go wrong for the university and good relations collapse. The study findings indicated that suspensions of students following various protests have enhanced and improved student discipline in the campus to a certain extent. However, the institution seems to be failing when it comes to implementing other strategies such as dialogue. During focus group discussions, the students told the researcher that their educators would lecture them against participating in demonstrations, this according to one student union leader is an attempt to dampen student activism at Central Johannesburg College.

Key Players and their Roles in Designing Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Used in Curbing Violent Protests in Tertiary Institutions

The findings discussed above mainly focused on the college as the key stakeholder in the management of student protests. The researcher then sought to find out the other stakeholders that had been involved in handling protests as well as their roles.

The Government

In all groups the government was mentioned to be one of the important stakeholders when it comes to designing the conflict resolution mechanisms for protests. However, virtually all the participants in focus group discussions were not content about the role played by the government. Their discontent is shown in the responses noted below;

"The government is sleeping on the job. Nothing tangible has been done so far to address the issues that we have raised before. The government is reactionary rather than coming up with relevant and effective policies, it only reacts when something like violent protests happens." – FDGS11

The above response could be an indicator why protests become violent; because the 'government reacts when violent protests occur'. This factor may make students feel that the government does not consider them as legitimate participants in the decision-making processes on issues that ultimately affect them.

"The government should be the main stakeholder, but then currently everything is politically polarised. That is why most of our educational needs are not met. They need to understand the difference between being in government and being a political party leader. Another problem is that they think if you are a student activist then your affiliated to the opposition parties which is not entirely true" – FDGS25

Student activism is about social change and transformation; it engages in claim-makings outside of formal decision structures. However, political activities of student are also legitimate forms of activism as well. Representation hinges on the notions of participatory democracy (Kunene and Pierse, 2019). Therefore, participatory democracy is established through collective governance measures that allow all key stakeholders, who include students, to have a say in decision making processes at both national and institutional. Findings made indicate that such a culture is not strongly upheld in South African tertiary education institutions.

One student union leader mentioned that,
"As students, we are directly affected by higher education policies which is why we request to be considered and prioritised as the key stakeholders and we want to participate fully in higher education governance at national level." SUL1

In the context of national policy processes, students need to communicate their interests to the government via their unions or associations hence the government should include these actors in decision making in the interest of effective policy development as well as legitimising the adopted policies and ensuring accountability. It is important to note that protests do not only look at fees and education accessibility, but also focus on various other social, economic and political concerns.

The Law Enforcement Agents

The Constitution of South Africa protects the right of all people to assemble and express themselves by protesting or demonstrating. The police are allowed constrict restrictions on the exercise of these rights and freedoms. South African Police Services (SAPS) and Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) are therefore one of the key stakeholders that play particular designing and implementing conflict resolution mechanisms to curb violent protests in tertiary institutions. Central Johannesburg College is one institution that has previously worked with the police in managing protests, this was confirmed during interviews and discussions. However, the administrators and

students had different views on the role which SAPS and JMPD played. While mentioning that the institution also engaged with the police whenever there were protests. One administrator stated the following;

"When we involve the police it does not mean that we want to intimidate or harass the student during their protest but the point would be to determine the level of safety and security as well as revealing any potential threats towards peace within the institution. We adopt a multi-disciplinary strategic approach to deterring criminal behaviour and protecting the college community." – AD2

Moreover, Miller and Lindel, (2016) opine that the education institution should follow both national and institution regulations, which should be clear and fair and such regulations should provide a sufficient mechanism for unilateral decisions to be challenged. It was noted however, that the Central Johannesburg College was failing to effectively follow the procedures set out in the college's own regulations and policies. This resultantly leads to the students being alienated and united for their cause, even if it takes violent protests.

Effectiveness of the Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Employed By Key Players towards Promoting Peaceful Protests in Tertiary Institutions
Virtually all the students who participated in the focus group discussions felt that violent protests were more effective than the peaceful ones.

"With this polarised government, diplomacy does not work. I am not condoning violence but I have noticed a pattern that when protests are aggressive both the government and institution react quickly. But when it is peaceful, they take their time and sometimes do not even respond at all." – FDGS36

The above finding shows that growing frustration can lead to violent protests if the issues at hand are not addressed quickly. This is an indicator the resolutions mechanisms employed are not really effective until demonstrations become violent.

Another interesting response was obtained from a student;
"The institution is totally clueless when it comes to resolving disputes so they then resort to dictatorship and intimidation." – FDGS6

However, in argument one administrator noted,
"We have a very good relationship with the students and their unions. But there are a few rogue ones who always turn violent whenever they

want to express themselves and that is why the college has put in very strict measures and penalties against violence and vandalism." – AD2

DISCUSSION
The findings of the study confirmed the theories which were used in the study. The Deprivation Theory believes that when people are deprived of things considered as valued in their society, they tend to join social movements with the expectation of getting their grievances rectified (Abraham and Grant, 2015). The students indicated the lack of student satisfaction with the services which Central Johannesburg deprived them of when they felt entitled to them. The Deprivation Theory served as a beginning point to the research in looking at why student join protests in the first place. Some students indicated that they felt rightfully entitled to freedom of speech and they actually used the terms 'depriving us' and 'suppress our right' which according to Chazan and Gymah-Boadi, (2015), can lead people to rebel. The lack of freedom of speech could be a major influencer of feelings of deprivation amongst students thus leading to conflicts. The second theory which was used is the Frustration and Aggression Theory. This theory believes that aggression is the consequence of hindering, or frustrating somebody's attempts to achieve a certain goal. The proposition is that frustration continuously come first before aggression and that aggression is the definite result of frustration (Altbach, 2015). The emotional responses from the students on how they felt that the college and government were not doing enough to address their concerns was an indicator of frustration in itself.

Student protests have an important role to play in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. However, when they turn violent, they tend to have adverse effects not only on the institutions, but on the achievement of academic goals and national development. It is therefore important for institutions to employ amicable conflict resolution strategies in order to prevent or minimise violent protests. The findings of the study identified the conflict resolution initiatives that the Central Johannesburg College has put in place.The Central Johannesburg College culture believes in Safe Space concept whereby it is not allowed to do activities which intimidate or disturb other students who are not part of the protests. The students however believed that this concept was being taken advantage of to stifle

their protests even though they were peaceful. The findings indicate that the noble concept was now being used to suppress the right to protests and freedom of speech rather than encouraging it. However, the Central Johannesburg College seemed to be using this concept to censor students and target them. Similar findings were made by Albom and Mitch, (2019) who noted that although the safe space provided support for students by promoting diversity, inclusion and sensitivity; it was also abused by the college authorities to infringe on the other critical rights such as the right to demonstrate or free speech. According to Miles, (2019), safe spaces should be provided in educational institutions in order to empower students to speak freely on particular issues that affect them.

However, Lawson, (2018) argues that safe space policies in educational institutions protect the interests of all students by restricting harmful practices by students. The concept of safe spaces originally intends to ensure that everyone in an organisation feels secure and receives quality educational services which they would have enrolled for. The college administrators felt that protestors infringed the rights of other students. They explained that when protests occur, they disturb educational functions and disturb other students who would want to distance themselves from these protests. Informed discussions and engagements between stakeholders was another strategy that was being used to manage conflicts thus curb violent protests. Findings revealed that Central Johannesburg College had put in place opportunities for dialogues and consultations, however the students were not content with the manner in which these dialogues were conducted. The students indicated that such negotiations were influenced by the Central Johannesburg College leadership hence they were not conducted independently thus lacking sincerity. According to Fisher, Ury and Patton, (2019), individuals should enter a dialogue with the intention of reaching an agreement but rather with different motives.

The major key players in designing conflict resolution mechanism for curbing violent protests which were mentioned in this study were the government and the police, besides Central Johannesburg College itself. However, the students seemed not to be happy and content with the roles played by these parties. From the findings, it seems that there was political interference and lack of political will to engage with the students. From the findings made, students echoed that the government was an important stakeholder when it came to designing conflict resolution mechanisms for protests. They were however not content with the role being played by government. The government seemed to be reactive rather being proactive towards protests meaning that it took measures only after the conflicts had escalated rather than doing something to prevent them. Heike and Seddon, (2018) explains that when a government is reactive it then cannot be able to minimise the intensity of conflict escalation effectively, thus violent protests. Violent protests are more destructive, costly and difficult to transform and this is why it important for the government to put significant attention in being proactive rather than reactive.

The police seem to be involved mainly during the protests in order to curb violence and vandalism as well as to protect the protesters and non-protestors. However, the students felt that the police only intimidated and suppressed their demonstrations. The South African law give the police power to implement minimum force when maintaining public order during protests. It is their duty to maintain peace while enforcing the law. When students become violent, destruct property and obstruct the police from enforcing law activities then they can be arrested. Responses from students showed some lack of understanding on this matter. It is the peaceful demonstrations which are a right in South Africa and not the violent ones. According to Luescher and Klemencic, (2017), the police respect and permit freedom of peaceful assembly and expression. Virtually, all the students who participated in the focus group discussions felt that violent protests were more effective than the peaceful ones.

Moreover, poor interactions between the stakeholders could be the reason why the efforts to curb violent protests are ineffective. The approaches being used by the Central Johannesburg College-Alexandra Campus were found to be of limited relevance for coping with internal conflicts with students. There is need for the institution to implement improved and strategic analysis of conflict dynamics with the students and use conflict prevention approaches in a manner that is inclusive, constructive and long term (Kaunde, 2017). The college used proactive measures which included safe spaces concept, informed decision and engagements between key stakeholders and student participation in institution governance as conflict resolution mechanisms. While these are commendable approaches, the

manner in which they were being implemented was ineffective because they were not genuine and did not serve the interests of the students. They were being used by the institution to prevent protests rather than encouraging free speech and providing the students with the opportunity to be heard. All this seemed to have led to the student dissatisfaction which could be breeding ground for violent protests.

CONCLUSION

Findings have shown that various initiatives had been employed by the key players in managing violent protests at Central Johannesburg College and these included dialogues and engagements, safe space concept, promotion of student participation in college governance as well as intimidation and arrest. However, it seems that from the findings made from Central Johannesburg College, the students had a right to free speech as a way of handling conflicts. However, their freedom after the speech was not guaranteed. The safe space concept and intimidation tactics such as arresting protestors and suspension were being used as a strategy to manage violent protests. It was argued however, that this was not done to punish protestors but to punish those that engaged in behaviours that disrupted the functioning of the institution and violating its policies. The study however, concludes that there is lack of clear policies at the college on what counts as disruptive which could mean that if the college is disagreeing with a student's position or if his/her speech is viewed controversial it could be viewed as disruptive. The major key players in designing conflict resolution mechanism for curbing violent protests which were mentioned in this study were the government and the police, besides Central Johannesburg College itself. The government was mainly responsible for developing some conflict resolution mechanisms for student protests. Also, the government took part in initiatives such as dialogues in order to hear and address the concerns of students at national level.

The college institution which was the main area of study was mentioned to be a key player in curbing violent protests as it implemented the conflict management and resolution initiatives with the students. The study concludes that the students lacked trust in government and the college which is a basis for any principled dialogue or conflict resolution initiative. The police seemed to be another key player in managing violent student protests. Student arrests seem to be common at Central Johannesburg campus. Increasingly harsh and violent policing and intimidation tactics from their campus security services, punitive suspensions, and mass arrests which have been experienced by students indicates a complete lack of foresight from university managers and serves only to recruit more students to their causes. Findings from focus group discussions indicated that students felt there were no adequate steps by their institution towards incorporating students into the decisions that need to be made at their school. The poor relationship between the college and students could be a clear indicator that the impulse to discipline and control young people may be due to the intention by the college to avoid a contentious conversation. However, the measures put in place to enhance peaceful protests seemed not to be effectively solving the problems. The study concludes that the even though voices of students at Central Johannesburg College are heard, they are not given power. Students are not granted the power to change or to have a hand in the important decisions on their campus. It is important that their opinions are taken seriously and considered when making the important board decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions made above, the following recommendations were made;

There is need to include authentic and genuine student representation on leadership teams and they should be treated as full members not just as observers. Young people need to be considered as stakeholders and partners in their institutions hence they should contribute to key decisions and when new goals are being set. Such reforms which are initiated with student input may likely improve the governance practices and development of the institution. There is need for the Central Johannesburg College to design some mechanisms for regular and sincere consultative version of student participation to more active participation that accords enough space for student concerns and issues to be freely aired and properly addressed.

Student protests and demonstrations are permitted as long as they are peaceful, non-obstructive and respectful to the mission of the institution. Student unions should ensure that they know and observe the South African laws regarding their protests and demonstrations. Doing so will help in the coordination as they will be equipped with accurate and helpful information. Student should know and comprehend their rights as well as the

legal parameters. Also, it is critical to ensure that during protests, the participants respect the rights of other people who are non-participants or those that disagree with them. Any student who engages in disruptive or disorderly conduct, fails to comply with the directions of regulations and can be subject to disciplinary action. Respecting the law and territorial boundaries can be beneficial to the students during their protests. It means that they are avoiding or keeping in mind the potential adverse consequences of property damage.

In order to be most effective one has to stay ahead, thus being proactive rather than reactive. It is important to build a culture where protests are dealt with before they actually occur. Proactive conflict prevention is a more cost-effective way of handling conflicts. The college management should put in place a command structure spelling out who will make decisions, monitor developments on the ground, and respond to any news-media requests. They should decide in advance what developments will prompt them to summon outside law-enforcement agencies and who will work with the police.

There is need for the key stakeholders to promote the consensus building and democratic participation of students in order to effectively resolve the important issues, encourage good college governance and augment peaceful student protests. Dialogues can be implemented in informal or institutionalized manner.

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