Analysis of Ubuntu as a Transformative Strategy to Mitigate Social Unrest in the University system

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Abstract

University system, all over the world, most especially in Africa had witnessed various social unrest traceable to social factors such as; student-management dichotomies, disagreement between staff unions and university management, external and political interferences, gangsterism, among others. These in our observations and experiences had impeded in so many ways, the speedy actualisation of the predetermined goals and objectives of the university system. We recognised that solutions to this lacuna were propounded by various scholars and educational agencies, despite these interventions, the problem still persist. In lieu of this, Ubuntu philosophy, is presented as an alternative process, input and output to mitigating the challenges of social unrest in the university system. This argument was made to answer the prevailing question of; how can Ubuntu, the philosophy of love, oneness, humanity and togetherness be used to unravel social unrest in the University system? The study is situated in transformative paradigm. The analysis was done using Socio-thematic Analysis where Ubuntu praxis and literature on students' unrest constitute the data and argument in order to present an alternative strategy that could ensure peaceful university operations. We concluded that honest practices, humanity, social inter-dependency and togetherness via unity of purpose are dimension of peace and tranquility in the university system with recommendation all stakeholders should be trained and retrained on the importance of ubuntu, while ubuntu practices as a compulsory module or course is recommended for students.

Keywords: Social unrest, Ubuntu, transformative Paradigm, University System, Students-Management Relationships

Introduction

The state of university education in Africa cannot be divorced from instability and unruly unrest ranging from students-management disharmony, disagreement, misunderstanding and power differentials (Davies, Ekwere & Uyanga, 2015; Fomunyam, 2017; Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2020). This unethical situation featured as one of the major obstacles against the speedy actualisation of the university goals and objectives (Khaleduzzaman, 2014). Such effects include but not limited to the inability of the university to produce graduates within the residence and approved year of academic calendar, societal disruptions, killing of unsuspecting students and university staff, destruction of lives and property, among others (Omodan, Tsotetsi & Dube, 2020). Scholars like, Akinyeye (2019) have linked social unrest in the university system

to weak professional relationships and administrative recklessness of the powerful stakeholders (university management) against the powerless (students), academic and support staff. The problem according to Ekundayo & Alonge (2010) is linked to unilateral decision-making of the university management that has resulted in various students' protests and subsequently led to loss of lives and valuable belongings. Increment in tuition fees, introduction of unsubstantiated fees, obnoxious policies, obsolete physical facilities and social amenities had reportedly led to dichotomies between the university management and students' community (Davis, Ekwere & Uyanga, 2015; Postma, 2014). In the light of the foregoing, this study focused on the social unrest/crisis between student's community and university management. This, henceforth will be referred to as social unrest.

Literature exist that various solutions were recommended by scholars to ameliorate the issue of social and or students' unrest in tertiary institutions, including universities. Among which is the provision of effective communication among the university stakeholders propounded in Ghana (Ferdinand, 2017) to respond to the issue of incessant students' crises in the country. This solution according to Gyan & Tandoh-Offin (2014) followed autocratic management styles bedeviling the education sector with recommendation that schools must design an effective communication strategy. United States of America also responded to students' unrest by formulating Implementation of Threat Assessment Plan (ITAP) (EduRisk, 2018) to prevent school violence that was rampant in the country. It also enables the government in conjunction with the schools to ensure a swift response to any unrest based on the prior knowledge acquired from the ITAP (Fein, Vossekuil, Pollack, Borum, Modzeleski, & Reddy, 2002). Sri Lanka in a bid to respond to students' crises in tertiary institutions recommended adequate funding and university autonomy as a way to ameliorate the persistent unrest in its higher institutions (NEC, 2007; Weeramunda, 2008). This solution also shared from the recommendation of Ogunlade, Ekundayo and Omodan (2015) and Oni and Adetoro (2015) that tertiary education in Nigeria should be adequately funded and provided with adequate facilities along with inclusive decision-making that constitute the major agitations of students. Having explored challenges and subsequent solutions as recorded by the literature, observations and experiences showed that the students related social unrest is unabated and continues on a daily basis. This may not be unconnected to the gap created by the researchers and the agencies relevant to university system by neglecting the potentials of ubuntu in their solutions. Recent cases of students protest happens in March, 2021, in Ekiti State University, Nigeria and almost all universities in South Africa were recently shut down by students with various enlisted agitations that emanated from the lip service paid to welfarism cum ubuntuism. This is an indication that those solutions may have worked to some extent, but not absolutely effective. There comes the introduction of Ubuntu, the philosophy of love, oneness, humanity and togetherness (Kamwangamalu, 1999; Le Grange, 2012) as a tool that could ensure peaceful university operations, mostly between the students and the university authorities cum management. The extricates and intricacies of Ubuntu will be unpacked below within the purview of the following research question.

Research Question
In order to ensure relative peace and tranquility in university system through Ubuntu, the following question is formulated to guide the study;
- How can Ubuntu be presented as an alternative to unravel social unrest in the University system?

Situating the Argument in Transformative Methodology
This study is lensed within the purview of Transformative Paradigm. This paradigm is also adopted as a guiding methodology for this study. This is appropriate because the study aims to transform the crises situation that has affected the university education, not only in Africa but virtually worldwide. Transformative Paradigm according to Jackson, et al. (2018) is a framework that cherish the exploration of experiences and social dependencies of the marginalized communities including the power play and various contradictions that has led to the marginalization. This according to Mertens (2009), is a research framework that takes solace in advocating social justice by ensuing that the voice of the powerless is hard,

majorly to ensure that the predicament of the researched are changed for better (Dube, 2019). Hence, this paradigm helps us to view the researchers as one family that must come together to ensure the productivity of the university system. This is in consonance with the argument of Jackson et al. (2018) that the uniqueness of this methodology lies in the understanding of the relationships that exist between the powerful (University authorities) and powerless (students). This idea helps us to logically present our views towards providing solutions to the issue of social unrest in the universities.

Besides, the choice of ubuntu as an alternative to preventing social unrest is derived from the argument of Dube (2016) that Ubuntu and other transformational theory such as feminism, critical theory, decoloniality is transformative approach that is meant to inject social changes from an existing status quo. Therefore, answering the research question; *how can Ubuntu be presented as an alternative to unravel social unrest in the University system,* we used Socio-thematic Analysis (StA) to analyse Ubuntu in themes alongside its principles, where Ubuntu praxis and literature on students' unrest constitute the data and argument in order to present an alternative strategy that could ensure peaceful university operations. This was done based on its relationship to university operations and management, the need for students and university management to ensure ubuntu spirit. StA as propounded by Omodan (2019) is a combination of thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006), and Conversation analysis of Nordquist (2019), which incorporates the prediction of social realities of the researched into data interpretation, that is the data is broken down into themes and each theme is subjected to sociality test. It is a system of analyzing social issues thematically in order to understand how people relates together. The idea is that the sociality and social dependency of the research, when understood helps analyst to predict or re-introspect into their relationships (Omodan, 2020). The analysis from this section were used to draw conclusions and recommendations on practices that are ideal for the university system.

Etymological and Conceptual Praxis of Ubuntu

Ubuntu as a philosophy originated from African ways of doing things, within the confines of African community(ies). Ubuntu as a language though acquires more accolades from Xhosa words; "ubu" which mean "being" and "ntu" which mean "human" (Ramose, 1999). Limitless to this, Zulu language of South Africa also interpret Ubuntu to mean human and/or humanness in the same vein, Shona and Ndebele language in Zimbabwe have it as "unhu" and "ubuthosi" which bother on been humane (Samkange & Samkange, 1980; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). According to Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013), the origin of Ubuntu is not limited to Southern Africa but to other languages across Africa. "Tanzania has it as "bumuntu", Congo, Angola, Malawi, Mozambigue and Uganda use the words "bomoto", "gimuntu", "umunthu", "vumuntu" and "umuntu" respectively" (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). In Yoruba language, one of the languages in Nigeria also has it as "Isokan" which means oneness even amidst various socio-cultural and dialectic diversities. This etymological exploration is not to contest language superiority in African context but to justify that Ubuntu has it roots in mostly all African cultural dispositions through Languages. From the interpretation, we agreed with Sparks (1990), Tworeck, Hemminga, Huber and Dhillon (2015) that Ubuntu is a philosophy that is centered on being human in its qualitative phenomena. This is not far from the conclusion of Moloketi (2009) and Khomba (2011) that Ubuntu is humanism that is, people exist because of one another. Since this is credited to Africans through their cultural dispositions and languages, one could then argue that Ubuntu is an Africanized culture of love, oneness, togetherness, caring for one another and togetherness.

From the above argument, further notion could be proposed that ubuntu is a philosophy that unites people in Africa and beyond. That is, it exists to re-explain the reason for togetherness as a strength against a common goal or enemies. Perhaps, the strength of Ubuntu which "*I am because we are*" (Mbigi, 1997; Mbigi, 2000; Tutu, 2000; Lefa, 2015; Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2020), also, we agree with the principles of interconnectedness, good behaviours, collectivism, communal spirituality and interpersonal relationships as a derivative argument from the concept of Ubuntu (Msengana, 2006; Mbhele, 2015). This argument has

been summarized by Brack, Hill, Edwards, Grootboom, and Lassiter (2003) as a philosophy of morality that shapes peoples' social conduct. This is to further confirms that Ubuntu is relevant to this study because its place in the analysis of social relationships and social actions and inactions is sacrosanct and could be fundamental to the relationships that co-exist among university stakeholders, most especially between the students and university authorities. We further argue that Ubuntu philosophy as entrenched in our argument below potent a social dependency towards human sociality, management, differentiated analysis in African (Nzimakwe, 2014), and beyond. This could also be argued along the fact that it is indigenous understanding and predicting human sociality. Though the endogeneity is not the major focus of this study. From the above etymology of Ubuntu, the following assumptions suffixes. They are; Honest practices. Humanity, Social inter-dependency and Togetherness.

Analysing the Assumptions of Ubuntu

From the origin and concept of Ubuntu as discussed above, we are able to categorize Ubuntu into four cardinal assumptions that could be used to ameliorate the prevalence of students' unrest in the universities. These assumptions are seen from the existing lack of good relationships between the university authorities and students (Oyaziwo, 2001; Adeniyi, 2014; Ogunbodede, Idowu & Odeyemi, 2020), though not limited to students, but also extended to staff unions (Okojie, 2011; Sabo, Umar & Kaoje, 2019). This analysis, is however, focus on ubuntuism and its relevancy in managing students' unrest by building ubuntu-like relationships between the duos.

Honest Practices and Implication on Managing students' unrest

Honesty according to an adage is the best policy, that is, the best policy an individual and or organization could device is being honest. Honesty and trust have been linked to organizational effectiveness resulting from employee's motivation (Buckley, 2011), that is, when the policy and its implementation process are based on trust and honesty, the work process will be done without an iota of grudges and there will be less agility for resistance. In the case of students being the subordinate, and the university authority being the super-ordinate, there is a need to establish trustworthiness. This could mean a process where the policy and its implementation process are based on solid transparency and open-door syndrome. This corroborates the argument of that leadership credibility and potential for openness is tantamount to a mutual influence among followers (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). The findings of Eisenbeiss and Giessber (2012) further confirm that the place of honesty and trust in organization is significant to organizational influence. This also share a tendency to instill tranquility in the system because when there is honestly and trust, the urge to agitate for unpleasant issues will be reduced because it is likely for students to listen to the position of university authority. This is could mean that such authority has been operating under honesty in dealing with the students in the time past.

In the history of students' unrest, the continuous agitations from students is that the university managements/authorities are found of using pseudo-democratic leadership style which is amounted to deceit. The students' unrest that happens in Nigeria in the past 20 years, the allegation has remained that the promise of university authorities towards student welfares, security, provision of adequate facilities, implantation of funding and social amenity policies are not well integrated (Ajibade, 2013; Orunbon, Salami, Akinyemi & Adetunji, 2018). Universities in South Africa also have their share from the alleged dishonesty towards students welfarism and funding (Isilow, 2021; Macupe, 2021). In this case, the place of honesty and trust is not well articulated by the concern's authority. This is not to erase the fact that the university authorities have their own defense as most of the issues also concern either states/provincial and federal government's ability to be responsive to the citizens' need.

On the other hand, students also have their deficiencies in their agitations, that is students' agitations of today is laced with unruly misconceptions where students misinterpret and misunderstand privileges and right. Sometimes, students' agitations showed that every dispositions or kind gesture of the

university management which are privileges, are expected to be constant, and if university, maybe due to one reason or the other unable to fulfil such, the student will go on the street to protest against it and mostly lead to social unrest. That is, the issues of honesty and trust as principle of Ubuntu is not one sided, but concerns all the stakeholders. Therefore, there is a need for university authority to establish spirit of ubuntu by ensuring that there is transparency and openness in policy formulation, process and implementation. This is in consonance with the recommendation of Czerniewicz, Trotter & Haupt (2019) that authorities should ensure open door policy in dealing with students related matter. To us, we believe that the best management practice towards conflict management is the prevention which is the hallmark of this proposition.

Humanity and Implication on Managing students' unrest
Humanity is life and life is humanity while being humane is one of the principles of ubuntu, therefore, humanity here is viewed as the humane in human nature. That is, humanity could be seen as a concept that makes people human within a compassionate and lovely ability towards one another. However, the concept of humanity cannot be diverted from the characteristics of people (Fitzsimons, 1970; Reiter, 2017). The introduction of Human Right Development globally has drawn the attention of education sectors, mostly Universities to humanism in the process of educating. That is, the issue of social justice, recognition of rights and privileges has a fundamental place in the educational process. Hence, the argument of Nel (2018) confirms that education remains a force behind a humane and just society, this is also entrenched in the agenda of Education for All movement. This is not far from the recommendation for a just, inclusive and equitably quality education (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, the place of Humanity in educational organizations is not a strange phenomenon but the observation along with literature potent the assumptions that little or no humane practices are implemented in the university system which have led to so many social unrests. This is supported by the finding of Sung & Yang (2009), and Polat (2011), that university authorities have little or no mutual relationship with students' leaders and have resorted into countless of students protests of social disruptions.

The finding of Aluede, Jimoh, Agwinede, & Omoregie (2005) confirms that majority of social unrest in universities are caused by social disconnectedness of the university authorities from the students' community. This is ranged from lack of provision of social amenities such as hotel accommodation, electricity supply, durable water and lack of inclusive decision-making. This was linked to power differentials taking place in the system resulting to unilateral decision-making process of the authorities without considering the importance of students in the decision-making process. We argue that such situation bothers on lack of good relationships between the stakeholders and a confirmation that humanity is still a word to them, rather than organizational practices. This also suffixes in the recommendation of Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) that university authorities must be accessible to the staff and the other entities in the university because mutual relationships were found to have a significant relationship with organizational productivity. This means that when the authorities are assessable to the students' populace creates a practical relationship where students could assess the *powerful* (university authorities) at any time there is need to call the attention of the authorities to issues. In this case, universities, both the super-ordinates (university authorities) and the subordinates (students) must see themselves as human, that must be treated as such with utmost recognition and respect towards university goal. The assumptions here is that, when all the stakeholders possess the spirit of humanity, there could be less agitations and if there is any agitation, it will not be outside of peaceful means.

Social Dependency and its Implication on Managing students' unrest
Ubuntu is saying that people are interconnected and that people exist because of one another, not because of individuals but in groups. This idea further points to the fact that society is made of various people with interconnected duties and responsibilities. That is, human beings exist to corroborate one another. Therefore, no one could exist in isolation (Scrafford, 2018), in fact, nature itself doesn't exist in isolation

(Nature's Web of Science, n d.). This is to further confirm the principle of ubuntu that retaliates on the saying that, "I am, because we are" (Tutu, 2000; Lefa, 2015). That is, human beings are dependent on one another to survive. This is not different to the connectedness of people in the organization such as university system. As such, the stakeholders in the system cannot exist without one another. If there are no students, there cannot be a staff of any kind, likewise if there is no staff, there cannot be students. Therefore, understanding must be flaunted to show that the existence of the two critical stakeholders is important to the actualization of the pre-determined goals and objectives of the universities. This is supported by the argument of Labanauskis and Ginevičius (2017) that students and academic staff constitute one of the major reasons why universities are called an ivory tower of knowledge. This may be because, the dispenser of knowledge is the academic while the receiver are students, and students thereafter proclaims the quality of education by contributing to nation building in the future. From this, we therefore argue that students and the university authorities are very important and dependents on each other towards the same goal, which is university productivity.

Allegations exist that power differential exist between the university authorities and the students' community. The authorities are assumed to be powerful and can decide on anything or compel students to follow a certain procedure even when students are not instrumental to such discission (Akinbuli, 2013). This further confirms the arguments and research findings that university authorities do not believe that students can make any meaningful impact when expose to managerial processes. Such findings are that universities are using unilateral decision-making, autocratic style and other pseudo system of management to have their ways (Fomunyam, 2017; Akparep, 2019). This attitude has led to many unrests in university system. Among these unrests escalated from the above disconnections are students' unrest at Ladoke Akintola University, Lagos State University, Obafemi Awolowo University of Ibadan in Nigeria (Etadon, 2013; Premium Times, 2017). In South Africa, such incidence is not hidden, almost all universities also witness such social unrest resulting from various dichotomies between the students and universities (Engelbrecht, 2015; Mutekwe, 2017). Therefore, one could deduce from the above exploration that the universities are not implementing the tenet of social dependency where the ego of superiority are swallowed. Rather the power and it embedded politics are allowed to bedeviled the system.

Togetherness and its Implication on Managing students' unrest
Togetherness in this article is synonymous to unity of purpose and in diversities. Yes, university like every other organizations are established for purposes, among which is teaching and learning, character modeling, production of skilled graduate for nation building, research and knowledge development, among others (Higgs, 2002; Davies & Amesi, 2009). this is an indication that universities also focus on one or two goals and objectives, which could only be actualized by people otherwise called employees, in the case of university, they are called employees and students (Kim, Kim, & Kwon, 2020). The process of utilizing human resources to actualize university goals and objectives, therefore needs unity, oneness and togetherness among its stakeholders within organizational diversities. That is, the university authorities must understand that they are not better than other people but put in position of authorities because of the university goals and objectives. On the other hand, the students must be made aware that they are in the system not because of any other reason other than to help fulfil the same goal towards productivity. However, productivity in this study is defined along with Obermiller, Fleenor and Peter (2005) that students are the products of educational institutions. This is also corroborating the findings of Trivikram (2016) that productivity of the any organizations, including universities, depends on the unity among stakeholders, including the least level staffing. Therefore, one could conclude that no organization could survive without unity and togetherness. Perhaps that is what is responsible for social unrest in the universities.

The analysis here depicts that university stakeholders must see themselves as one, working towards achieving the same goals and objectives. From this perspective, students must be aware that even if there is a need to stage a social protest in the form agitation against the university authorities, they must take note

that both entities are working towards the same goals. This will checkmate their excesses before, during and even after social unrest. This also in accordance with the 3Cs of students' agitation namely, Consultation, Consolidation and Confrontation (Adam, Mohammed, Alsadi, & Suleiman, 2019). The confrontation stage must be carefully staged as not to jeopardize the university goal itself. On the university authority side, students must be seen as an entity characterized with youthfulness who are also significant to the actualization of university goals and objectives with not age discrimination. This is in accordance with findings that being students is insignificant to their contribution to policy development, also their involvement in the university decision making as one indivisible body is a point of motivation that create a sense of belonging towards goal achievement (Mati, Gatumu, & Chandi, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendation for Practices

Deducing from the above analysis, we have demonstrated that Ubuntu is one of the fundamental managerial tools that could be used to mitigate the persistence social unrest emanating from students-management dichotomies in the university system. The argument was rooted in the principles cum assumptions of Ubuntu and its relevance to preventing students' unrest in the system. These assumptions; honest practices, humanity, social inter-dependency and togetherness were intersected with the literature on the various social unrests with evidence that the unrests could be prevented if the spirit of ubuntu is made part of administrative process in the system. We further argue that Ubuntu is a transformative *way of life* that is not only peculiar to cultural or social issues but also has it place in both formal and informal settings where people are involved. University is not an exemption considering diversities, personal, social and power differentiations that exist among the stakeholders. Based on the above exploration, we therefore conclude that honest practices. humanity, social inter-dependency and togetherness via unity of purpose are dimension of peace and tranquility in the university system. When there is peace, university objectives and productivity is imminent and the university will be transformed from the current perpetual unrest to a peaceful state with unhindered university operation. Based on our conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- The university authority is enjoyed to ensure that university operations are implemented based on honest practices and trustworthiness. This will enable the subordinates, such as staff and students to believe in the means presented by the university to actualize it aims and objective and willingly support it.
- Humanity on the order hand must be injected into administrative process in order to ensure that students and also critical stakeholders see the university goal as their own goal. This could only be achieved when there is spirit of humanity and humanness from the authority to students and students also respond with humane disposition to university peace.
- Various awareness must be staged in the university community to sensitize its stakeholder, including students on their unavoidable relationships which must be channeled towards the achievement of university goal and objectives.
- And lastly, the university authority must ensure that the compulsory amalgamation of the university authority and students be positively used for the purpose of the university rather than taking strength in sectional weaknesses of either of the parties.
- We also recommend that university must at all time organize training and re-training on ubuntu practices for staff and probably entrench ubuntu as a compulsory module/course for students, at least in their first or final year. This will enable the stakeholders to be re-orientated in the practices.

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