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# HARNESSING UBUNTU PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT UNREST MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Student unrest management is a significant challenge in higher institutions in Nigeria. It leads to the destruction of school property, extended academic calendars, and an increased likelihood of student involvement in criminal activities during school shutdown. The situation warranted a need to reconsider management approaches to student unrest. Underpinned by Ubuntu theory, this conceptual paper explores Afrocentric approaches to mitigating and managing student unrest. Conceptual analysis was adopted to explicate the nuanced relationship between Ubuntu principles and managing student unrest. First, the article provides an overview of the history of student unrest in Nigeria and examines the existing strategies for managing student unrest and their success rate. The study examined the professionalization of student unionism in Africa, considering diverse scholarly viewpoints on student unrest and the consequences of student protests on students, institutions, and national progress. Based on Ubuntu's principles of community building, mutual respect, and collaboration, the article focuses on finding solutions in the best interests of all parties involved by prioritizing relationships and the interconnectedness of stakeholders over individual interests. Hence, the article proposes a model for transforming student unrest management in Nigerian higher institutions. Recommendations were made on the explications.

**Keywords:** Student unrest, Ubuntu theory, Student unrest management, Afrocentric management approach

## INTRODUCTION

Student unrest challenges higher institution administrators globally (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Students in higher institutions in many countries often leverage the provisions in their nations' constitutions and the United Nations Declaration for Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of peaceful protest and the right to education. Observations and previous studies reveal that students at higher institutions in many countries have repeatedly abused these provisions and taken them out of context (Fomunyam, 2017). Studies showed that student unrest in many African higher institutions is associated with tuition fee hikes, inadequate facilities and resources, autocratic management styles, negligence of school administrators versus student concern, perceived injustices from lecturers and administrators, and accommodation-related issues (Fomunyam, 2017; Harris & Hern, 2018; Healy-Clancy, 2017; Strong & Jimil Ataman, 2023). Such protests typically include demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and sit-ins (Onivehu, 2021; Schmidt, 2018). Episodes of student unrest have varying colorations, degrees of magnitude, and attendant consequences. The aftermath of student unrest includes injury to students, loss of lives, damage to school properties, school closure, elongated teaching periods of programs, and disruption of state economic activities (Strong & Jimil Ataman, 2023).

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The historical, social, and political factors underpinning various forms of student unrest in African higher institutions are complex. Previous studies propose that student unrest across Africa is traceable to the first generation of African nationalists and their activities in the anticolonial struggle. In a study titled "Student Protest and the Culture of Violence at African Universities: An Inherited Ideological Trait," Fomunyam (2017) examined the spate of student unrest in 20 African countries, covering the north, south, east, central, and western regions. The results showed that the culture of student activism and protests on African campuses took root from the spirit of the struggle for freedom.

In Nigeria, higher institutions are riddled with student unrest; hardly a semester rolls by without an incidence of student protest on some campuses (Alimba & Adindu, 2019; Viatonu et al., 2018). Particularly noteworthy is how the average student's perspective on the relationship between universities and students was shaped by the Portuguese mantra "A luta continua, Vitoria e certa," which translates to "the struggle continues, victory is certain!" (Thom, 2017). The mantra reconfigures the mentality of newly matriculated students by instilling the consciousness to resist the constituted authority to obtain their demands. This disposition toward higher institution management accounts for several episodes of higher institution shutdown and elongated years of program completion. Given this background, one of the questions that comes to mind is how effective crisis management approaches are in higher institutions in Nigeria.

Studies have shown that ongoing episodes of student unrest in Nigeria are linked with deficiencies in the existing strategies to manage student unrest. The strategies for managing student unrest are informed by the inherited colonial bureaucracy, autocratic leadership, and cultural inclinations that detest dialogue between the old and the young (Akanji et al., 2019). For example, Akanji et al. (2018) studied the influence of leadership styles on work engagement and conflict management practices in Nigerian universities. The results showed that cultural values significantly influence the preference for authoritative, transactional, and transformational leadership styles because higher institutions' leaders believe decision-making on student issues is an exclusive duty of school management. However, such an administrative style is considered repressive; thereby, students resort to protest to lend their voices to institutional management decisions that concern them. Studies have shown that an autocratic approach to managing student unrest is frequently met with stiff opposition from students (Aina & Obi, 2022).

Rukato (2020), in a study titled "Student Movements and Autocracies in Africa," noted that student movements in Senegal, Tanzania, and Sudan had challenged autocracy since independence, which has changed political power bases within and outside higher institutions. Nigerian experiences are no different. This result correlates with the findings of Akanbi et al. (2016) in a comparative study focusing on conflict management strategies adopted by two former vice-chancellors of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria (an institution adjudged among students as the powerhouse of student activism in Nigeria). The respondents were asked to evaluate the vice-chancellor based on leadership constructs/styles, such as democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. The study found that the vice-chancellor who adopted a democratic leadership style recorded fewer episodes of student-management conflict than his counterpart who adopted an autocratic conflict management approach. However, despite the conflict management approach or strategy, student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions remains concerning. Omodan (2022a) noted that despite adopting mediation, dialogue, inclusive decision-making, and conflict coaching in conflict management, incessant conflict is still deeply embedded in the fabric of Nigerian higher institutions.

Given the failure of existing student unrest management strategies in Nigerian higher institutions, this study proposes a transformative cum Afrocentric student unrest strategy that transcends the flaws of Eurocentric and culture-orientated leadership and conflict resolution strategies. To fill this gap, this study advances Ubuntu principles as a transformative strategy for

mitigating and managing student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions. The article predicates Ubuntu's principles for two reasons; first, Ubuntu is Afrocentric, a quality that enables higher institution stakeholders to resonate with its principles and values in conflict mitigation and management. Second, Ubuntu respects and prioritizes the community's interest above individual interest. This article further establishes our position by answering some pertinent questions: What are the perspectives and their implications on student unrest as an instrument of student activism? How do student protests impact students, institutions, and the nation? How effective are existing student unrest management strategies in curbing the threat of student unrest? Finally, how can Ubuntu principles be leveraged as a transformative instrument to manage student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the historical perspectives of student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions, divergent perspectives on student unrest (Aluta) as an instrument of activism, the impacts of student unrest on students, higher institutions, and national development, and the evaluation of commonly adopted student unrest management strategies and their implications.

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF STUDENT UNREST IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

Student unrest has been persistent and widespread in Nigerian higher education since the colonial era and has significantly impacted the educational system's quality and stability. Specifically, student unrest in Nigerian universities can be traced back to the 1920s, when students at the Yaba Higher College protested poor living conditions and racial discrimination (Aluede et al., 2005). The colonial authorities violently suppressed the protest, closing the college. Similarly, in 1948, the Ibadan student unrest at the University College Ibadan was staged in protest against the poor quality of education, racial discrimination, and colonial interference in college administration. The protest led to suspensions and the principal's resignation (Peter & Ebimobowei, 2015). In 1978, the Ali Must Go protest was a nationwide demonstration against increased tuition fees and the meal-ticket system introduced by the Minister of Education. The protest turned violent, resulting in casualties, property destruction, and the reversal of policies (Abdullahi et al., 2014; Beckman & Jega, 1995; Longe & Kasara, 2022). The 1986 anti-structural adjustment program (SAP) protest opposed the SAP, leading to a brutal crackdown by security forces (Adejumobi, 2000; Federici, 1992; Odion-Akhaine, 2001). In 1992, students organized another nationwide and multisectoral protest due to the military Junta occasioned by the annulment of the June 12 election. The military government resisted the protest, severely repressing and closing universities (Amuwo et al., 2001; Idachaba, 2001; Ojo, 2001). The 2010 Aluu 4 student protest generated nationwide outrage and peaceful demands for justice for four students killed by a mob (Orjinmo, 2022). One of the more recent protests includes the demonstration against university closures during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 . In 2020, the ENDSARS protest resulted from multiple factors, such as extrajudicial killings, assaults, harassment, extortion, bad governance, and youth unemployment. The protest started as demonstrations in a few states but later spread across all states with high-level coordination via social media (Onivehu, 2021; Orabueze et al., 2021). The mobilization gathered momentum and metamorphosed into a multisectoral movement like the Tunisia 2010 pre-Arab Spring movement.

Table 1 gives an overview of student unrest between 2001 and 2020. The table comprises state and higher institution targeted protests and their repercussions.

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Table 1: An overview of post-millennial student unrest in Nigerian university campuses

| YEAR | REASON(S) FOR STUDENTS UNREST | INSTITUTIONS | REPERCUSSIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2001** | Appointment of new vice-chancellor | Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria | Death of several students and closure of the university for weeks |
| **2002** | Protest against the increase in tuition fees and other academic charges | University of Jos | Closure of the university for several months |
| **2004** | Lack of water and electricity on campus | University of Lagos | Death of several students and the destruction of university properties |
| **2009** | Protest against the decision to increase the cost of accommodation | University of Ibadan | The protest turned violent, leading to the closure of the university for several weeks |
| **2012** | Increase in tuition fees | University of Nigeria, Nsukka | Clashes between the students and the police and the destruction of university property |
| **2013** | Student protest against the poor conditions of hostels and classrooms | University of Abuja | The protest led to the closure of the university for several days, and the management was forced to address some of their demands |
| **2014** | Delay in academic calendar due to strikes by nonteaching staff | Federal University of Technology Akure | The protest escalated into a violent clash with the police, resulting in injuries to many students and damage to university property |
| **2016** | Lack of power supply and conditions of the student hostels | University of Port Harcourt | The protest turned violent, leading to the death of several students |
| **2017** | The management decided to rusticate some students for their involvement in a social media campaign against the university | University of Lagos | The protest led to clashes with the police and the temporary closure of the university |
| **2018** | Poor living conditions, particularly lack of water and electricity on campus | Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife | The protest led to the university closing for several days |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2018** | Management's decision to enforce a new dress code policy; the policy was seen as oppressive and discriminatory | University of Ibadan | Resulting in a shutdown of academic activities for several days |
| **2019** | Hike in tuition fees | Federal University of Technology Akure | School closure |
| **2020** | Appointment of an acting vice-chancellor without due process | University of Lagos | Disruption of academic activities |

Note that student unrest in Nigeria can be directed at the state or the institution administrators, depending on perceived failures. Several significant student protests in Nigeria demonstrate this duality. Student unrest encompasses sociopolitical, institutional, and individual factors. Sociopolitical factors include unfavorable policies, political repression, human rights violations, and ethnic or religious conflicts. Institutional factors include poor staff–student relationships, inadequate facilities, high tuition fees, and nonresponsive university authorities. Individual factors include violations of rules, lack of social amenities, and involvement in cultism. These conflicts frequently reflect deeper structural and social issues, such as authoritarian governance, poor funding, and inadequate staff motivation (Aluede et al., 2012; Odebode, 2019; Onivehu, 2021; Onyeonoru, 2000; The Guardian, 2022).

Furthermore, the protests demonstrated Nigerian students' and youth's power and resilience by raising awareness of the issues affecting Nigerian society. They inspired civic engagement and responsibility among citizens. However, the protests also resulted in violence, destruction of lives and property, destruction of public infrastructure, and disruption of academic activities (Okoye et al., 2021). The most tragic incident occurred on October 20, 2020, when members of the armed forces opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos, killing 12 youths, most of them students. The incident sparked outrage and condemnation nationally and internationally. In the following section, we discuss the strategies frequently employed by higher education administrators in Nigeria to address and manage student unrest.

## ASSESSMENT OF COMMONLY ADOPTED STUDENT UNREST MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

University administrators have implemented various strategies to address student unrest, ranging from the complete prohibition of student activism/unionism to employing suppressive measures. Regrettably, many of these approaches have proven ineffective, counterproductive, and, in some cases, detrimental to students' rights and well-being, resulting in unfavourable consequences for the institutions involved.

### BANNING STUDENT UNIONISM

Banning student unionism on campuses intended to prevent or suppress students' collective voice and action by denying them the right to form and join associations representing their interests and concerns. However, this strategy violates the students' fundamental human right to freedom of association, as enshrined in various international and national instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Omodan et al., 2021). Moreover, this strategy breeds mistrust and resentment among students who might resort to violent or illegal means to express their grievances and demands. Furthermore, this strategy deprives the university administration of a legitimate and

representative communication and negotiation channel with students, which could facilitate effective student unrest management (Omodan et al., 2021a).

## THE USE OF FORCE BY GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTION AUTHORITIES

Another commonly used strategy is to deploy armed forces to campuses to quell possible violence. This strategy involves using police or military personnel to intervene in student unrest, using force or the threat of force to disperse or arrest the protesters. However, this strategy often escalates rather than de-escalates the conflict because it can provoke more resistance and confrontation from the students, who might perceive it as an infringement on their academic autonomy and dignity. Moreover, this strategy frequently results in human rights violations, such as excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, torture, or even killings of students, as evidenced by several cases in South Africa and other African countries (Omodan et al., 2021). Furthermore, this strategy undermines the academic culture and ethos of the university, which should be based on dialogue, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

## POLITICIZATION OF STUDENT UNIONISM

A third strategy is to politicize student unionism. This strategy involves political parties or factions within or outside the university co-opting or manipulating student union leaders. The aim is to influence or control the students' agenda and actions to support or oppose the university administration or the government. However, this strategy compromises the autonomy and integrity of student unionism because it diverts the students' attention from their genuine academic issues and interests to partisan political interests. Furthermore, this strategy creates divisions and conflicts among students along political lines, undermining their solidarity and collective action. This strategy exposes students to external interference or manipulation by political actors with ulterior motives or agendas.

## VICTIMIZATION OF STUDENT UNION LEADERS

The fourth strategy is victimizing student union leaders through rustications, school closure, and evocation of litigation against them, resulting in their incarceration. This strategy involves punishing or sanctioning student leaders or unions who organize or participate in student unrest. The aim is to deter or intimidate them from further activism or protest. However, this strategy violates the students' right to due process and fair trial because they can be subjected to arbitrary or disproportionate disciplinary measures without proper investigation or evidence. Moreover, this strategy alienates or radicalizes student leaders or unions who might feel persecuted or oppressed by the university administration. Furthermore, this strategy disrupts or delays academic activities and the progress of affected students and the entire university community.

## IMPACT OF STUDENT UNREST ON STUDENTS, HIGHER INSTITUTIONS, AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Student unrest in higher institutions has significant and wide-ranging effects on students, institutions, and national development. We consider it crucial to examine the consequences of student unrest to understand the broader implications of these incidents.

## RUSTICATION AND EXPULSION OF STUDENTS

Students are the primary recipients of the consequences of campus unrest and, unfortunately, some instances have resulted in student fatalities during confrontations with armed security personnel called upon by university authorities to mitigate potential violence (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021; Uyanga, 2016). Rustication or expulsion of student leaders by higher institution authorities is also prevalent in some campuses, and in certain cases, student union leaders have faced legal proceedings leading to incarceration (Oboegbulem et al., 2019; Olowokere, 2014). Furthermore, extended periods of unrest and industrial actions of university staff disrupt the academic calendar and force students to spend considerable time away from campus, hindering their educational progress (Adanna & Ogunode, 2022; Uyanga, 2016). These disruptions are detrimental to individual students and their educational pathways.

## UNPLANNED HIGHER INSTITUTIONS EXTRA-BUDGETARY ALLOCATION

Student unrest also has significant implications for higher institutions. Extra-budgetary spending becomes necessary when schools are shut down and students are off campus because the financial resources allocated for the academic year are diverted to cover overhead costs, such as salaries and other essential commitments, without the corresponding student output (Okey, 2021). Institutions that frequently experience student unrest suffer from poor reputations, leading to decreased student enrollment and, consequently, reduced revenue (Awodiji et al., 2021). In some cases, even parents with average income prefer to enroll their children in private higher institutions to avoid the loss of time due to school closures (Iruonagbe et al., 2015). Furthermore, the destruction of institutional properties during student riots financially burdens institutions, with rehabilitation costs falling on their shoulders (Peter & Ebimobowei, 2015). Occasionally, students are asked to pay damages before the school reopens, creating further tensions and conflicts between the institutions and the students.

## BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER

At the national level, frequent student unrest leads to a breakdown of law and order (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). Many higher institutions are located along national and state roads; these roads are frequently blocked during student protests, disrupting socioeconomic activities. For example, during the student-led ENDSARS protest, national and state roads were blocked throughout the country, leading to significant disruptions and economic losses (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). Furthermore, governments at various levels experience revenue loss during unrests. Furthermore, since society relies on skilled labor from higher institutions, disruptions to the academic calendar negatively impact the supply of skilled labor across all sectors of the country. Studies have shown that a shortage of skilled labor negatively affects the national Gross Domestic Product and, by extension, national development.

Student unrest has far-reaching consequences for students, higher institutions, and national development. Students face significant educational disruptions, and higher institutions bear financial burdens and damage to their reputations. Nationally, the breakdown of law and order, loss of revenue, and shortage of skilled labor impede socioeconomic progress. Understanding and addressing these impacts are crucial to effectively manage student unrest and promote a conducive educational environment in higher institutions.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Ubuntu ideology originated from African cultural traditions and practices, particularly within African communities. The term Ubuntu is derived from the Xhosa language, comprising two words: *ubu*, meaning being, and *ntu*, meaning human (Omodan, 2021b). Additionally, South Africa's Zulu language interprets Ubuntu as meaning human or humanness. Shona and Ndebele speakers in Zimbabwe denote the terms as *unhu* and *ubuthosi*, respectively, both signifying the notion of being humane. According to Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013), Ubuntu is not only limited to Southern Africa but is also present in other African languages. For instance, Tanzania denotes it as *bumuntu*, Congo, Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, and Uganda refers to it as *bomoto*, *gimuntu*, *umunthu*, *vumuntu*, and *umuntu*, respectively (Omodan & Ige, 2021). Irrespective of the local name ascribed to Ubuntu, the core principles are the same across races and tongues. These principles include *humanity, interconnectedness, collective responsibility, empathy, compassion, and restorative justice*.

***Humanity:*** This principle emphasizes the need to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every human, implying the importance of treating each other with kindness, compassion, and respect (Lerutla & Steyn, 2022; Maluleka, 2020), regardless of differences in race, culture, or social status (Grischow et al., 2021; Rodny-Gumede, 2017). The principle holds that an individual has intrinsic values that must be acknowledged and respected, irrespective of background, belief, social status, or political affiliation. The tenet also emphasizes inclusivity and equality.

***Interconnection:*** This tenet holds that "a person is a person through other persons," meaning that our humanity is interconnected with that of others around us and that we all thrive when we support each other (Maluleka, 2020). The principle recognizes that individual humanity or the state of being human is expressed via interdependence on another. Thus, what affects one person affects everyone in the community to which they belong. This principle encourages togetherness toward the greater good of all rather than focusing on individual gains that can be detrimental to the community (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Makhurane, 2020; Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019). Ubuntu promotes cooperation, compassion, and mutual support by embracing interconnectedness as a guiding principle, creating a harmonious and thriving society (Breda, 2019; Omodan, 2022b).

***Collective responsibility:*** The principle of collective responsibility stresses the importance of individual responsibility and accountability to the community they belong to (Campbell et al., 2015; Magang & Magang, 2017). It also states that the individual's actions affect them and their community (Bhattacharyya, 2021; Kholopa, 2022). Collective responsivity is applicable and relevant in various societies, including social work, leadership, and pastoral care (Magezi & Khlopa, 2021; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Ndlovu, 2016). The principle is moral and deeply ingrained in traditions, cultures, and religious practices of many African societies. Collective responsibility contributes to a community's cohesion and stability (Mufune, 2003). By implication, the principle supports participatory citizenship in a democratic setting.

***Empathy and compassion:*** This assumption recognizes the need to understand others' perspectives and be aware of their concerns and struggles (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021). It stresses the importance of understanding and caring for others (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021; Omodan & Diko, 2021) as an essential element of traditional African dispute resolution methods (Berghs, 2017). When disagreements arise in communities, parties involved are expected to come together to resolve the issue with empathy, compassion, and understanding in a manner that is mutually beneficial to the parties involved (Türk, 2018). Traditional African societies value empathy and compassion in conflict resolution because it promotes harmony, cooperation, and social solidarity.

***Restorative justice:*** This principle is also known as the principle of *forgiveness and reconciliation*. Since conflicts and misunderstandings are natural in human relations, forgiveness and reconciliation to promote healing and restore harmony within the community become

imperative (Teleki & Kamga, 2020). The tenet holds that conflict should be resolved through dialogue and participation rather than punishment and exclusion of the offender from the community. The offender and the victim must engage in dialogue to resolve their differences. In such instances, victims are expected to express their feelings and expectations while the offender listens, shows remorse, and apologizes to the victim. The principle advocates the willingness of both parties to repair the damage and prevent future recurrence (Ncube, 2021).




Figure 1. Ubuntu-orientated student unrest management framework (constructed by the authors)

Despite the benefits inherent in practicing the Ubuntu principle as a conflict management framework, some might argue that Ubuntu is too idealistic and unrealistic in the modern world, where individualism, competition, and self-interest dominate (Magezi and Khlopa). We argue that the existence of bad does not make good irrelevant. Since we are not living in an ideal world, the coexistence of good and evil will continue. However, a conscious effort must be made to attain a better world where good surpasses evil. They may also question the applicability and relevance of Ubuntu to other regions and cultures with different values and histories. Therefore, we argue that Ubuntu originated from Africa as an Afrocentric conflict management framework, considering that the principles represent realities and express African core values as opposed to what is available in other regions. Since its principles resonate with an African value system, the argument that it is not universal is inconsequential as long as it solves African problems, among which is student unrest.

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# METHODOLOGY

This conceptual article is grounded in the transformative paradigm and employs conceptual analysis (CA) as its primary research method. The transformative paradigm is suited for studies focusing on marginalized communities, analyzing power differentials leading to their marginalization, and linking research findings to actions to reduce disparities (Jackson et al., 2018; Mertens, 2021; Romm, 2015). Given the objective of this study—to harness Ubuntu principles as antidotes for student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions—the transformative paradigm enables a deeper understanding of the underlying factors contributing to student unrest and facilitates the proposal of alternative management strategies rooted in indigenous African philosophies. The methodology enables a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter, ensuring the proposed framework is grounded in student unrest management literature. Moreover, the detailed data collection enhances the study's transparency and repeatability, allowing other researchers to replicate or build upon this work. By explicitly stating the search strategies and criteria, the methodology provides a roadmap for future investigations.

## TRANSFORMATIVE PARADIGM

The transformative paradigm emphasizes social justice and empowering marginalized groups (Mertens, 2021; Romm, 2015). It challenges existing power structures and seeks transformative change through research (Mertens, 2012). In this study, the paradigm facilitates an exploration of student unrest not just as isolated incidents but as manifestations of broader systemic issues within Nigerian higher education. By focusing on students' experiences—often a marginalized group within institutional hierarchies—the paradigm allows for a critical examination of current unrest management strategies and the proposal of more inclusive, culturally resonant alternatives.

## CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Conceptual analysis is an investigative method that scrutinizes the significance and implications of concepts, theories, and arguments (Baldwin, 2008; Berenskoetter, 2017; Fernandes et al., 2013). It involves identifying, clarifying, comparing, and evaluating different perspectives on a specific topic (Rodgers, 2000; Tofthagen & Fagerstrøm, 2010). CA is instrumental in identifying gaps, inconsistencies, ambiguities, or contradictions in current knowledge, thereby contributing to theory development and integration (Efuntade et al., 2024; Hillen et al., 2017; Hughes, 2019). This study used CA to dissect the nuances of Ubuntu principles and existing student unrest management strategies. By critically analyzing these concepts, the study seeks to explicate the intricate relationship between Ubuntu principles and effective student unrest management. The goal is to advance a framework that leverages Ubuntu's communal and ethical dimensions to address the lacunae in current strategies.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE: NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW (NLR)

The data collection procedure in this study follows the NLR approach. Given that the study employs CA within the transformative paradigm, the literature-gathering process is integral to developing and refining the conceptual framework. An NLR allows for a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge on a topic without strict systematic criteria (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). It provides flexibility in selecting and interpreting literature, enabling the critical analysis and integration of diverse sources to support conceptual exploration (Ferrari, 2015). This approach thoroughly examined Ubuntu principles and their applicability in managing student unrest, enriching the study's theoretical foundation.

## DATABASES AND SOURCES

Databases and sources, including ERIC, JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, and Scopus, were used to access various scholarly articles, books, and conference papers. These platforms provided a comprehensive collection of peer-reviewed and credible sources essential for the study's theoretical foundation. Furthermore, organizational repositories were explored to obtain localized, context-specific insights. Publications on universities and global university research institutions offered valuable perspectives, reflecting the unique dynamics of student unrest and management strategies within Nigerian higher education. These collections provided in-depth discussions on Ubuntu philosophy, conflict management, and educational leadership, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the concepts under investigation. Conference proceedings on education, conflict management, and African philosophy were also reviewed to capture recent developments and contemporary debates in the field.

## SEARCH TERMS AND KEYWORDS

We combined keywords and phrases to locate relevant materials during our literature search. These words include "Ubuntu theory," "Ubuntu philosophy," "student unrest," "student protests," "campus conflicts," "higher education," "universities," "tertiary institutions," "Nigeria," "African higher institutions," "conflict management," "dispute resolution," "transformative leadership," and "ethical leadership." These terms were strategically combined using Boolean operators, such as "AND" "OR," and "NOT," to refine the search results and effectively intersect various concepts. For instance, combining "Ubuntu philosophy", "student unrest", AND "Nigeria" helped narrow down the search to highly relevant studies. We did not apply strict publication dates to give the study a historical perspective and contemporary relevance by incorporating the most recent scholarly discussions. We also employed snowballing literature search techniques to enrich the literature base and ensure comprehensiveness. This process involved examining the reference lists of the selected articles to identify additional relevant literature that might not have been captured in the initial search.

## INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The inclusion criteria encompassed publications discussing Ubuntu principles regarding education or conflict management, studies addressing student unrest in Nigerian and African higher education institutions, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, credible reports, conference papers, and literature available in English. Conversely, our exclusion criteria eliminated articles unrelated to Ubuntu philosophy or student unrest management. We also excluded publications focusing on non-African contexts.

The selection process began with an initial screening of 253 identified publications. The publications' titles and abstracts were screened to ascertain their relevance based on the established inclusion criteria. This approach helped uncover seminal works and influential studies that significantly contributed to understanding Ubuntu principles and student unrest management. The preliminary review helped narrow down the pool of literature to the most pertinent studies. We conducted a full-text review of 65 selected articles after the initial screening. The full-text review provided a deeper understanding of each study's contributions, methodologies, and findings. Finally, we selected and included the 30 most relevant publications in the final analysis.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The selected literature was thematically analyzed using Ubuntu theory principles as the analytical framework. Critical themes were identified and categorized, focusing on *humanity, interconnectedness, collective responsibility, empathy, compassion, and restorative justice*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores how Ubuntu principles can be operationalized to mitigate and manage student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions. We explored the nuances of the principles of humanity, interconnectedness, collective responsibility, restorative justice, and student unrest management.

### HUMANITY AND STUDENT UNREST MANAGEMENT

The human rights principle of Ubuntu emphasizes kindness, compassion, respect, and empathy, essential elements of traditional African dispute resolution methods (Ayeni & Ibraheem, 2019; Louw & Wyk, 2016). Addressing student unrest is no different. Higher institution administrators should embrace the idea of being humane rather than formal and bureaucratic in the context of student unrest. They should be kind and compassionate and show empathy toward students, especially when they advance genuine concern. The principle requires that the management of all institutions collaborate and cooperate with the students to address their grievances and demands, promoting a culture of mutual respect and resulting in fewer episodes of student unrest on campuses (Dhakulkar & Olivier, 2021). It implies that authorities should compromise existing rules and codes of conduct that trigger student protests to resolve disputes. All stakeholders must recognize that they share a common goal of providing quality education and a positive learning environment (Elliott et al., 2013; Sun & Chiou, 2019). Previous literature links humanity with effective student unrest management. For instance, Cooney and Borland (2016) examined historical responses to student unrest, specifically the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre at the Universidad Autónoma de México and the 1970 Kent State University shootings, which they brought to bear the concepts for humanely and inclusively responding to student unrest. The authors highlight four potential contributors to student unrest: increased access to higher education, strained town-gown relations, outside influences, and intense social change. The study emphasizes learning from past failures and successes in responding to student unrest and prioritizing more humane and inclusive responses. The findings indicate that a more humane and inclusive approach to managing student unrest can prevent it from escalating to violence.

Similarly, Lefa (2015) explored being human by grounding discussions around Ubuntu in South African education and society. He focuses on the issue of discipline in schools and how Ubuntu impacts discipline among learners and teachers. He contends that Ubuntu is the soul force that drives almost every facet of societal life in African societies, creating the relationship between the African community. He proposes that the failure to embrace Ubuntu in South African schools manifests through learners' indiscipline and staff not respecting each other.

## INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND STUDENT UNREST MANAGEMENT

Ubuntu recognizes the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. It acknowledges that student unrest does not occur in isolation but is influenced by broader social, political, and educational factors. Understanding and addressing the root causes of student unrest requires considering the interdependencies among students, educators, administrators, and society. Similarly, scholars also affirm the impact of interconnectedness on social dynamics and its relevance to managing student unrest (Odari, 2020). Barac et al. (2021) emphasize that individual humanity is expressed through interdependence, where one person's actions and experiences reverberate within the entire community. Therefore, any disturbance or unrest affecting an individual student ultimately affects the entire student body and the institution (Omodan, 2019; Omodan & Ige, 2021). Embracing interconnectedness as a guiding principle in managing student unrest promotes a shift from individualistic pursuits to a collective focus on the greater good of the community. Cooperation, compassion, and mutual support are essential components of interconnectedness (Omodan, 2022b). Omodan (2022a) argues that Ubuntu philosophy can be used to mitigate the psychological implications of student unrest among university students in South Africa. The study used CA to show how interconnectedness, commonality, values, human dignity, and compassionate disposition can ameliorate the stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness students experience due to unrest. When students and institutional stakeholders recognize the interconnected nature of their experiences, they are more likely to collaborate to resolve conflicts, address grievances, and create a harmonious environment conducive to learning and personal growth. By integrating the principle of interconnectedness into student unrest management strategies, higher institutions in Nigeria can foster shared responsibility and accountability among students, faculties, and administrators. This approach encourages dialogue, empathy, and active participation with the concerns and needs of all stakeholders, mitigating potential conflicts and facilitating peaceful resolution (Omodan & Diko, 2021).

## COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND STUDENT UNREST MANAGEMENT

Collective responsibility promotes shared ownership and accountability among stakeholders, leading to transformative practices in education management. In the context of student unrest management, this principle implies that all stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and society, must address the underlying issues and create a conducive environment for positive change. Institutional authorities must create an avenue for dialogue involving all stakeholders where individual and collective responsibilities are emphasized to find lasting solutions to issues that would have resulted in student unrest. By cultivating collective responsibility, educational institutions can promote an inclusive and harmonious environment that addresses concerns, reduces the likelihood of unrest, and promotes positive student engagement.

Previous studies concur that collective responsibility as a Ubuntu principle effectively manages student unrest. For example, Omodan's (2020a) study redefines the strained relationship between students and university authorities. Using participatory action research, the study engaged 10 participants, including student leaders, university management, lecturers, and security personnel, through focused group discussions and analyzed the data using socio-thematic analysis. The findings highlight collective responsibility to manage student unrest, emphasizing students' personnel services provision, modern maintenance culture, transparency, and accountability for fostering peaceful university operations free from social unrest. In another study, Mantzaris and Pillay (2015) examined how Ubuntu can foster collective leadership and ethics in South African higher education institutions. They assert that Ubuntu can address the challenges of student unrest, violence, and vandalism by fostering dialogue, tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. They demonstrate this claim with a case study of a

South African university that adopted Ubuntu as a core value and implemented various initiatives to promote it among staff and students. Similarly, Manojlovic (2018) examined the dynamics of student unrest and the significance of collective responsibility in managing conflicts within educational institutions. The findings underscored the role of open dialogue in fostering a sense of community, the importance of shared values and goals in reducing conflicts, the emergence of relational responsibility in strengthening community ties, and the benefits of collaborative learning in empowering students and mitigating unrest.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND STUDENT UNREST MANAGEMENT

Ubuntu emphasizes restorative justice and harmony in the community. For example, it has become an integral part of the constitutional values and principles informing the interpretation of the Bill of Rights and other laws in South Africa. The theme of restorative justice has become evident in the jurisprudence that encompasses customary law, eviction, defamation, and criminal law matters (Himonga et al., 2013). Restorative justice aims at restoring victims and reintegrating offenders back into the community and restoring relationships and social harmony undermined by conflict (Schoeman, 2013). Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of the restorative justice principle. In the context of student unrest management, Ubuntu implies that erring students should show remorse and willingness to change their behavior and that institutional authorities should avoid extreme and punitive measures that have long-term consequences on their lives. Measures such as using live bullets and expelling student leaders who are often finalists should be avoided. Institutional policies and codes of conduct for students should be reviewed to incorporate and embrace restorative justice as a form of amnesty for erroneous students during protests.

Moreover, since the expulsion of key student leaders frequently escalates student unrest, the involvement of state government representatives as mediators is essential when handling high-profile student misconduct cases during protests. However, it is crucial to note that while restorative justice can effectively manage specific types of student unrest, such as minor behaviour infractions or conflicts, it might be unsuitable for more severe offences requiring formal disciplinary action. This prevents students from taking the law into their own hands by relying on the rules/policies that provide restorative justice in the institution's code of conduct. This section provides directives on how Ubuntu principles can offer a transformative strategy for effectively managing student unrest by fostering a sense of community and a culture of inclusion (Molose et al., 2018).

## POTENTIAL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING UBUNTU PRINCIPLES

While Ubuntu principles offer a promising framework for managing student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions, several challenges might impede their effective implementation. Recognizing these obstacles is crucial for developing strategies to overcome them and ensuring the successful adoption of Ubuntu-based approaches.

### RESISTANCE FROM ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators might resist adopting Ubuntu principles because entrenched organizational cultures prioritize hierarchical authority and punitive measures over collaborative and restorative practices (Anderson, 2017). This resistance could stem from concerns about maintaining control, skepticism about the efficacy of Ubuntu in conflict management, or a lack of familiarity with the philosophy. Administrators accustomed to traditional management approaches might find shifting toward a more communal and empathetic leadership style challenging.

## RESISTANCE FROM STUDENTS

Students might exhibit resistance, particularly if there is a deep-seated distrust in institutional authorities or if previous attempts at dialogue have been ineffective (Fomunyam, 2017). Some students might perceive Ubuntu principles as abstract ideals that do not address immediate grievances or doubt the administration's commitment to genuine change. In addition, students' diverse backgrounds mean that not all students may relate to or value Ubuntu concepts equally.

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND MISALIGNMENT

Nigeria's rich cultural diversity implies that Ubuntu philosophy which originates from Southern African contexts, might not seamlessly align with all indigenous philosophies and practices (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). The heterogeneity of cultural norms and values across different regions and ethnic groups could lead to misunderstandings or misapplications of Ubuntu principles if not carefully adapted to the local context.

## INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Structural and institutional constraints, such as rigid policies, limited resources, and bureaucratic inertia, can hinder the adoption of Ubuntu-based strategies (Dlamini, 2018). Existing regulations might not support the flexibility required for restorative practices, and there might be insufficient funding or personnel to implement new programs effectively.

## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

To effectively address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is necessary. One crucial strategy is **education and training**. Providing comprehensive education and training for administrators, faculty, and students can foster a deeper understanding of Ubuntu principles and their practical application in conflict management (Ngubane & Makua, 2020). Workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning sessions demystify Ubuntu and illustrate its benefits, facilitating its integration into institutional practices.

Another critical aspect is **inclusive policy development**. Engaging all stakeholders in the development of policies ensures that diverse perspectives are considered and fosters a sense of ownership and commitment (Molose et al., 2018). Collaborative policy-making can bridge gaps between administrators and students, reducing resistance and enhancing the effectiveness of the implemented strategies.

**Cultural adaptation** is also crucial in enhancing the relevance and acceptance of Ubuntu principles within Nigeria's diverse cultural contexts. Integrating local philosophies and values with Ubuntu can help create a hybrid model that resonates with a broader audience (Odari, 2020). This adaptation acknowledges cultural nuances and ensures the principles are meaningful and applicable within the specific cultural milieu.

Implementing **pilot programs and case studies** allows institutions to evaluate Ubuntu-based strategies on a smaller scale, demonstrating effectiveness before wider adoption (McCluskey et al., 2008). Successful case studies can build confidence among stakeholders and provide practical examples of how challenges can be overcome, serving as a blueprint for broader implementation.

Building **trust and open communication** is paramount in mitigating distrust and fostering mutual respect. Establishing transparent communication channels and demonstrating a genuine commitment to addressing student concerns can significantly enhance relationships between

students and administration (Gregory et al., 2014). Regular dialogues and feedback mechanisms enable continuous improvement and reinforce the principles of Ubuntu.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this conceptual paper provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations to offer a balanced perspective. One significant limitation is the **lack of empirical validation**. This theoretical study excludes empirical data to evaluate the proposed framework's effectiveness. Future research involving empirical studies or pilot implementations would be beneficial to validate the practical applicability of Ubuntu principles in this context (Katic et al., 2020).

Another limitation pertains to **generalizability**. The diverse nature of Nigerian higher institutions means the proposed model might not be universally applicable. Variations in institutional size, culture, resources, and student demographics might affect the implementation and outcomes of Ubuntu-based strategies (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings across all institutions.

**Cultural specificity** is also significant. Since Ubuntu originates from Southern Africa, some cultural nuances might differ from Nigerian contexts. Direct application without adaptation might not fully address local dynamics, potentially limiting effectiveness (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Tailoring the principles to align with Nigerian cultural contexts is crucial for their successful implementation.

The **scope of literature** used in the study is a limitation. The study relies on an NLR, which, while comprehensive, might not capture all relevant perspectives due to potential biases in source selection. Efforts were made to include diverse and credible sources; however, the inherent limitations of literature-based research remain (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

Addressing the challenges and acknowledging the limitations enriches the study by providing a realistic appraisal of what is required to implement Ubuntu principles effectively. By proactively considering resistance from administrators and students, cultural diversity, and institutional constraints, the study offers practical strategies to facilitate adoption. Recognizing these limitations also highlights areas for future research, such as empirical testing and cultural adaptation, contributing to the ongoing discourse on transformative approaches to managing student unrest in Nigerian higher institutions.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

### THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study significantly enriches the theoretical landscape by presenting Ubuntu principles as a robust framework for addressing and managing student unrest. It critically challenges the dominance of Western-centric models that have long been the standard in conflict management within educational environments. This examination underscores the pressing necessity for culturally relevant strategies that resonate with Nigerian higher institutions' unique social and communal contexts. By advocating for an Afrocentric approach, the study broadens the scope of academic discourse and emphasizes the importance of integrating indigenous philosophies and values into contemporary conflict resolution practices. Ubuntu, with its foundational emphasis on interconnectedness, community, and mutual respect, offers a compelling alternative that aligns closely with the lived experiences of students in Nigeria. This perspective validates the cultural identity of these students and fosters an environment where solutions to unrest can be collaboratively developed, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Furthermore, it encourages scholars and practitioners to explore indigenous knowledge systems as essential in developing effective conflict resolution strategies that resonate with local values and practices. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the unique challenges these institutions face and promotes a sense of belonging and collective responsibility among students and faculty.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Practically, the study signals a call to action for higher education administrators and policymakers. Integrating Ubuntu principles into institutional policies and practices increases the potential for more effective student unrest management. This includes:

Revising codes of conduct to foster inclusivity and respect: Higher education institutions should revise their codes of conduct in collaboration with student representatives. This endeavor should not be perceived as an abdication of authority to the student body but as a proactive measure to enhance inclusivity. Policies deemed excessively punitive by students should be revised to achieve a more equitable balance. Such revisions would foster an environment where diverse voices are acknowledged and appreciated. This collaborative approach can lead to a greater sense of ownership among students, encouraging them to engage constructively with institutional governance and promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

Establishing dialogue platforms/forums: A platform for dialogue between university authorities and aggrieved students is essential. Such platforms' membership should comprise university staff representatives across various units because staff who do not occupy principals or higher administrative positions, such as deputy vice-chancellors, registrars, or accountants, will have balanced perspectives on issues because they double as parents to the students and staff of the university. However, the student representatives should also include students who do not occupy leadership positions to avoid sentiment and bias, helping the university have a balanced perspective on prevailing issues and proffer appropriate solutions. Furthermore, such platforms will facilitate open discussions among stakeholders, allowing for the constructive exchange of ideas and concerns. It will empower students to express their opinions and contribute to shaping their educational experience, preventing potential conflicts before they escalate. Additionally, implementing regular feedback mechanisms can help institutions gauge student sentiment and address issues proactively.

Promoting collaborative problem-solving approaches: Against the top-down approach to problem-solving during student unrest, heads of institutions should embrace collaborative problem approaches by involving students in decision-making. Students better understand their challenges and corresponding agitations. Hence, they are in a better position to suggest solutions. This inclusion fosters a sense of ownership among students and encourages innovative solutions reflecting the diverse perspectives within the community. This collaborative spirit can lead to a more harmonious campus environment where students feel valued and heard, enhancing their educational experience.

These propositions address the root causes of student unrest in Nigerian tertiary institutions by fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose, reducing the likelihood of conflicts escalating into disruptive protests.

Influence on broader educational policies and governance: Further exploration of how Ubuntu principles can influence broader educational policies and governance nationally would significantly enhance the discussion. Integrating Ubuntu's emphasis on communal values, empathy, and mutual respect into national educational frameworks can transform how educational institutions address conflict and governance. By adopting these principles at a policy level, governments can promote a culture of inclusivity and collaboration, which might lead to more effective student unrest management nationwide. This approach benefits

Nigeria and has implications for other African contexts facing similar challenges. Considering the shared cultural heritage and educational dynamics across the continent, Ubuntu principles can broaden the scope of the study and contribute to a pan-African strategy for transforming higher education governance and conflict management.

### CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 (SDG4)

Highlighting how this study contributes to achieving the global SDG4 on quality education by 2030 further emphasizes its significance. SDG4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The study addresses a critical barrier to consistent and quality education by proposing Ubuntu-based strategies to manage and mitigate student unrest. Implementing these principles can lead to a more stable educational environment, reducing disruptions caused by conflicts and strikes. This stability is essential for improving educational outcomes and ensuring students can complete their studies on time. Moreover, the emphasis on inclusive and empathetic governance aligns with SDG4's targets related to safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments, contributing to the global agenda of enhancing the quality of education.

## CONCLUSION

This article explores how Ubuntu principles can be harnessed to manage transformative student unrest at Nigerian higher institutions. We argued that if adopted, Ubuntu's principles of humanity, interconnectedness, collective responsibility, empathy, compassion, and restorative justice can foster a culture of peace and social justice among tertiary institution leaders and students. We also proposed practical ways to implement Ubuntu-based approaches in addressing the root causes and manifestations of student unrests. Among such approaches are participatory management, conflict resolution, and policy reform. Hence, this proposition has implications for policy and practice. Notably, this paper is conceptual; hence, further empirical studies (both in qualitative and quantitative strands) are needed to establish the value and practical implications of its proposition. Nevertheless, based on the explanation of established theory and extant literature, we argue that the proposed framework is suitable and adaptable as a blueprint for operationalizing transformative management strategies for student unrest.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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