



Towards Sustainable Management of University Student Unrest through Internal Stakeholder Collaboration

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Abstract: *This study explores sustainable strategies for managing university student unrest in Zimbabwe through enhanced collaboration among internal stakeholders. Anchored in Stakeholder Theory (ST) and employing a qualitative research approach, this study explores how administrators, faculty, non-teaching staff and students perceive their respective roles in managing institutional unrest. It further identifies perceived barriers to collaboration among stakeholders and seeks to develop strategic interventions to mitigate these challenges. Findings reveal that while each group recognizes its role in conflict mitigation, communication breakdown, departmental silos, marginalization and lack of training hinder effective collaboration. The paper concludes with recommendations to foster inclusive decision-making, capacity-building, and trust-based communication structures as a sustainable framework for crisis management of student unrest in higher education.*

Keywords: *Student Unrest, Stakeholder Theory, Sustainable Crisis Management, Internal Stakeholder Collaboration*

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1. Introduction

An examination of extant literature reveals that globally, the 21st Century continues to witness unprecedented episodes of university campus crises mainly caused by frequent student unrest (Trachtenberg 2018; Gerber & Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2025; Rao & Wasserman, 2017; Lester, 2019; Sabzpoor et al., 2018; Lusk, 2020). A recurrent theme identified in scholarly discourse on university student unrest in Zimbabwe is the unexpected convergence of faculty, staff and striking students in opposition to university authorities. This alignment, often underpinned by mutual sympathy and shared grievances, has frequently exacerbated the intensity of campus crises (Chikozho & Munyuki-Hungwe, 2020; Gukurume (2020); Mujere, 2016; Musembi, 2017; Chikanda & Tichagwa, 2016; Chitambira, 2018). Mlambo and Adetiba (2021) argue that in contexts characterized by widespread economic hardship, faculty and staff often empathise with student demands, resulting in either tacit endorsement or

overt support. Such involvement complicates institutional efforts to manage unrest and maintain order. While faculty and staff participation could be driven by a genuine concern for student welfare or a desire for institutional change, it usually contributes to increased tensions, institutional fragmentation and operational paralysis. This internal alignment tends to entrench a polarized ‘us versus them’ dynamic within the university community, thereby escalating confrontations and hampering effective crisis resolution. Moreover, the convergence of faculty and student grievances present university authorities with a multi-faceted and challenging crisis to navigate through traditional top-down administrative measures. Although existing literature extensively documents the challenges posed by internal polarization during episodes of student unrest, there is a noticeable gap on how university internal stakeholders in Zimbabwe can collaborate to find a sustainable way of addressing the crisis caused by student unrest. Research findings can inform institutional policies regarding proactive student engagement, conflict resolution and campus peace education contributing to a

positive institutional image building and an enabling environment for academic excellence.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The persistent occurrence of student unrest in Zimbabwean universities, often intensified by the unexpected alliance between faculty, staff, and students against university authorities, underscores a critical challenge in higher education management. This convergence, often rooted in shared grievances, not only escalates campus crises but also complicates institutional efforts to maintain order and resolve conflicts effectively. Despite extensive documentation of these challenges, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding collaborative strategies among internal university stakeholders to sustainably address and mitigate the impact of student unrest. This study aims to fill that gap by assessing internal stakeholder perceptions, identifying barriers to collaboration, and proposing sustainable crisis management and collaborative approaches that foster effective conflict resolution and peace on campus.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1.2.1 How do internal stakeholders (students, staff, faculty and administration) perceive their roles in the institutional response to student unrest?
- 1.2.2 What barriers to collaboration among internal stakeholders hinder the effective management of student unrest
- 1.2.3 How can barriers to internal stakeholder collaboration be addressed to ensure effective management of student unrest

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perceived Roles of Internal Stakeholders in Managing Student Unrest

2.1.1 The Role of Administration

University administrations play a central role in maintaining campus stability and navigating the complexities of institutional governance. Their responsibilities encompass the development and implementation of crisis management protocols, the assurance of campus safety, and the delicate task of balancing the rights of students with the imperatives of institutional order and continuity (Chemerinsky & Gillman, 2017; Ezarik, 2021; Bimber et al., 2019; Kezar et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Gigliott, 2020). As the

primary agents of institutional authority, administrators are instrumental in shaping policies and responses that influence the campus climate, particularly during times of disruption or crisis.

However, research indicates that administrative practices characterised by authoritarianism, opacity and ineffective communication can contribute significantly to the escalation of student unrest (Ezarik, 2021; Kezar et al., 2020). When university leadership fails to engage in transparent dialogue, disregards student input, or adopts unilateral approaches to governance, it can undermine trust and magnify perceptions of marginalisation. Such dynamics not only weaken administrative credibility but may also promote protest movements and deepen institutional conflict.

2.1.2 The Role of Faculty

Faculty members frequently occupy a dual role within the university setting as both educators and mentors positioning them as critical intermediaries between students and institutional leadership. Their sustained interpersonal engagement with students, both inside and outside the classroom, allows them to recognise early signs of discontent, distress, or emerging conflict. As such, literature underscores the faculty's unique capacity to detect and address issues before they escalate, thereby serving as a vital component of early intervention strategies aimed at maintaining institutional harmony (Griffin & Griffin, 2019; Giroux, 2016; Cress et al., 2019; Wilcox & Ebbs, 2019;). However, political polarisation within academic environments has, in many cases, compromised faculty's perceived neutrality, complicating their ability to foster inclusive dialogue across ideological divides.

2.1.3 The Role of Non-Teaching Staff

Non-teaching staff occupy a foundational yet often under-recognized role within higher education institutions, particularly with respect to crisis detection and informal conflict resolution. Owing to their routine and sustained interactions with students across a variety of campus settings, such as cafeteria, library, residence halls, administrative offices, these staff members are uniquely positioned to observe shifts in student behaviour, identify signs of distress and respond promptly to emerging tensions (Tamrat & Teferra, 2021; Turner & Clarke, 2021). Despite their integral contributions, non-teaching staff are frequently marginalised in institutional decision-making processes. While they provide a wide array of essential and support services that sustain the daily operations and well-being of the university community, they are often excluded from strategic discussions and crisis response planning (Zhou & Walhunter, 2020; Anane, 2022; Pillay & Ngcobo,

2022; Tarisayi & Chikasha, 2018). This exclusion not only diminishes their agency but also limits the institution's capacity to adopt a holistic and inclusive approach to campus stability.

2.1.4 The Role of Students through the Student Representative Council (SRC)

Literature reveals that participation of students in governance processes and institutional decision-making can significantly reduce the likelihood of student unrest (Dalton & Crosby, 2020; Ostolaza et al., 2019; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2022; Tamrat & Teferra, 2021). Therefore, students through the SRC should not just be viewed as instigators of discord and unrest but critical stakeholders in conflict management and the overall governance of the institution. Scholars highlight several situations where political polarisation and micro-management by university authorities stifles the work of the SRC (Masenyama, (2021); Zinyemba & Chinomona, (2015); Zhou & Wolhunter, 2020; Garwe & Thondlana, 2019; Chikoko & Chimanihire, 2021). Thus, empowering the SRC better positions the institution to address root causes of student unrest and also curb escalation and contribute immensely to a positive campus climate.

2.2 Barriers to Internal Stakeholder Collaboration in Addressing Student Unrest

Collaboration among internal stakeholders is pivotal in effectively managing university student unrest (Madondo & Mpofu, 2023; Arslan & Darendeli, 2020; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2016; Sánchez-Polo et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2019). Universities, as complex institutions, depend on the coordinated efforts of various actors that include administration, faculty, non-teaching staff and student representatives to respond to and mitigate unrest. However, fostering such collaboration is often challenged by a range of barriers. Literature reveals that some of the major barriers to internal stakeholder collaboration is the silo mentality worsened by rigid departmental boundaries, communication barriers, marginalization and lack of training in stakeholder collaboration (Arslan & Darendeli, 2020; Zembylas, 2019; Deutsch & Coleman, 2016; Dewiyanti et al., 2019; Lam, 2021; Davis, 2022). The same scholars also postulate that investing in team building initiatives, upholding shared vision and common goals among the stakeholders, inter-disciplinary approach to crisis management, encouraging a culture of continuous learning and professional development are some of the strategies of enhancing stakeholder collaboration. However, collaboration may be a challenge in situations of political tensions, surveillance and polarization.

2.3 Enhancing Internal Stakeholder Collaboration

Effective crisis management in higher education necessitates robust collaboration among internal stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff and students. Mitroff and Anagnos (2019) emphasize that involving these groups during student protests fosters a collective understanding of underlying issues and facilitates the development of sustainable strategies. They advance for ongoing dialogue, shared decision-making, and relationship-building as essential components in addressing student unrest. In the same vein, Dewiyanti et al., (2019) highlight that a deliberate focus on teamwork fosters a collaborative environment conducive to stability. However, maximum success in teamwork is dependent on institutional values such as respect, inclusivity, diversity and peaceful coexistence. Winler and Mah (2019) and Johnson et al (2019) stress the importance of stakeholders trusting each other's expertise, respecting diverse perspectives, and valuing all contributions to address issues collectively. Arslan and Darendeli (2020) suggest that integrating insights from various disciplines enables a deeper understanding of the multifaceted issues contributing to student unrest. Thus, addressing student unrest through enhanced stakeholder collaboration requires a multifaceted approach that fosters open communication, inclusive decision making, including training and retooling strategies. Universities should prioritise proactive measures that facilitate meaningful engagement among stakeholders to effectively address student concerns and prevent future unrest.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study is grounded on the constructivist paradigm which emerges from the broader interpretivist research philosophy. In this study, the different perspectives and experiences of administration, faculty, staff and students were gathered and analysed with the aim of developing a sustainable framework of managing student unrest through internal stakeholder collaboration. The study used the qualitative research approach and the Qualitative Descriptive (QD) design with analytic generalisation which allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of key stakeholders through interviews and focus groups discussions. QD with analytic generalization enabled the researcher to capture contextual nuances by grounding data collection and analysis in the lived realities of students, faculty, staff and administration.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The targeted population were internal stakeholders of both state and private universities in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has currently a total of twenty-four (24) universities. The researcher used purposive sampling method to select two universities: one state university, and one private university based on a high probability of the institutions having rich information related to the study. This study used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Three (3) administrators, five (5) faculty members from randomly selected departments; five (5) non-teaching staff members from middle level management from each university were involved in the interviews. These were selected using purposive sampling method because of their knowledgeable and experiences with incidences of student unrest. In total, six (6) administrators, ten (10) faculty, ten (10) non-teaching staff members and four (4) student focus groups with ten (10) students each were interviewed. Additionally, from each of the two universities, the researcher selected twenty students to constitute two focus groups. The students were selected using purposive sampling method targeting those who witnessed student unrest on campus. The sample size was deemed to be heterogeneous and thus representing the population in the four outlined categories of internal stakeholders.

3.3 Data Collection

Three administrators, five faculty members and five non-teaching staff members from middle level management from each of the two selected universities were interviewed. Additionally, from each of the two universities, the researcher conducted two focus group discussions with students. In this study, the researcher decided to take notes during the interview through a secretary who tape-recorded the interview and the focus group discussions. This allowed the interviewer to focus more on asking the main questions and probing questions. Besides tape recording, notes were taken during all the data collection procedures as a back-up to the audio recording. Member validation was ensured by sharing the preliminary findings or summaries with participants to verify their accuracy and interpretation. This process allowed participants to provide feedback, offer clarifications, or suggest any additional insights that could enhance the validity of the findings.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study adopted the qualitative approach to presentation and analysis of data. Braun and Clark (2006)'s thematic analysis of data was used as a framework for analysis. The process involved drawing up emerging themes, sub-themes

and insights from the data, including examples of verbatim responses from the participants. By means of thematic analysis techniques, the researcher was able to collect and analyse the views of the participants guided by the research questions. Data was presented in tables showing samples of responses and highlighting themes and sub-themes.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

In compliance with ethical considerations, written permission to conduct the research was obtained from the two selected universities. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the study, identity of the researcher, objectives of the study and how results were to be published and used. Participants were given consent forms to complete and sign thereby confirming their willingness to participate in the study. The respondents were protected from physical, social, emotional and spiritual harm or from potential harm of any nature. To protect participants from marginalization, victimisation and stigmatisation, the researcher used pseudonyms. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

4. Results and Discussion

The research was conducted at two anonymised universities in Zimbabwe: one public institution, referred to as University X, and one private institution, referred to as University Y. To maintain confidentiality, data sources from the two universities were assigned alphanumeric codes. For University X, administrators are coded XA1 to XA3, while those from University Y are represented as YA1 to YA3. Faculty participants from University X were assigned the codes XF1 through XF5, and those from University Y were designated as YF1 through YF5. Similarly, non-teaching staff at University X were coded XS1 to XS5, and their counterparts at University Y were coded YS1 to YS5. Student participants were selected for focus group discussions at each of the two institutions. For University X, two focus groups were conducted and coded XST1 to XST2, respectively. The corresponding focus groups at University Y were coded as YST1 and YST2. Individual student participants within each focus group were further anonymised using numerical identifiers following a colon eg XST1:3 or YST2:7.

4.1 Findings of the Study

4.1.1 Perceived Roles in Managing Student Unrest

The table on appendix 1 shows the key themes that emerged from the findings and how these themes can be analysed using the Stakeholder Theory (ST) lenses. The responses reflected that administrators focused on preparedness, dialogue and collaboration while faculty see themselves playing key roles in mentorship. On the other hand, non-teaching staff viewed their roles as primarily focused on security, student engagement and media management depending on office of the participant. Both administration and faculty emphasised the importance of proactive measures, such as developing response protocols, assessing student concerns, and conducting research to address potential unrest. These roles aim to anticipate and mitigate crises before they occur. Administration and students also highlighted the value of open communication and dialogue in managing unrest. Students stressed the importance of non-violent conflict resolution and using the SRC as a channel for addressing concerns, though they observed limitations in its independence and effectiveness. On the other hand, faculty saw their role as advocates for student concerns. Both faculty and non-teaching staff viewed themselves as mentors and parental figures who provide emotional support and guidance to students. Their roles involve fostering trust and addressing concerns informally, which helps build relationships and de-escalate tensions. In conclusion, the findings reveal that different stakeholders perceive their roles as crucial in addressing student unrest, with administrators and faculty seeing themselves as key players in policy advocacy and mentorship. Students again feel their voices are often sidelined, indicating a perceived lack of salience in decision making processes.

4.1.2 Barriers to Internal Stakeholder Collaboration in Addressing Student Unrest

The table on appendix 2 shows the key themes that emerged from the findings and an analysis of the findings using the Stakeholder Theory (ST) lenses. The findings revealed that while internal stakeholders at University X and Y recognize their roles in managing student unrest, significant barriers exist, primarily related to communication and decision-making processes. Administration acknowledge breakdown in inter-departmental communication, especially during crisis, while faculty highlighted lack of clarity in communication channels and felt that information is not shared with them. Staff reflected that inadequate communication from administration leads to confusion while students felt excluded from decision making.

Consequently, the responses indicate that there seemed to be a systemic lack of transparent, consistent and inclusive communication. This contributes to misunderstanding, distrust and possibly unrest. Faculty and staff indicated that they feel sidelined as administration takes over during crisis times. Students noted that decisions that affect them were made without their input. They further noted that dependency on SRC limits broad representation. From these insights, it can be observed that faculty, staff and students felt that hierarchical structures and exclusion from the process of decision making caused mistrust and anarchy. This situation prohibits collaborative problem solving.

Furthermore, both faculty and administration emphasised the need for training, upskilling and capacity building in crisis and conflict management. Generally, the findings revealed that student unrest was often a symptom of deeper institutional issues such as poor communication, exclusion from decision making, lack of preparedness and mutual mistrust. There was a common desire for transparency and collaboration, as well as a recognition that a disengaged workforce can adversely affect student experiences. Collectively, these insights pointed to the necessity of fostering a more inclusive and communicative university environment to effectively address concerns and improve overall morale.

On the other hand, ST highlighted how barriers challenge the legitimacy, salience and engagement of key stakeholders such as faculty, staff and students. Thus, from the ST perspective, universities should strive to create a more inclusive, collaborative, and effective framework for managing and preventing student unrest.

4.1.3 Mitigating Barriers to Stakeholder Collaboration

Administration emphasised the importance of open dialogue, and they identified communication breakdowns between departments as a significant barrier towards collaboration. Faculty supported the sentiments from administration by stressing the necessity for clear channels to facilitate effective collaboration. Recognising and appreciating diverse skills and experiences was viewed as essential for enhancement of teamwork and collaboration. Faculty also highlighted the importance of trust among stakeholders, advocating for transparent communication, empathy and active listening to foster unity.

Members of the non-teaching staff echoed the need for better inter-departmental communication to enhance co-ordination and efficiency. They also stressed the need for inclusivity and diversity in addressing student challenges.

Staff mentioned the need to always maintain a good rapport with SRC to promote campus peace. Special emphasis was placed on the need to invest in training programs for internal stakeholders to enhance collaboration, trust and effectiveness in crisis management. Establishing mechanisms for robust feedback to keep stakeholders informed and engaged was highlighted as crucial in promoting collaboration.

4.2 Discussion of Findings Based on Reviewed Literature

4.2.1 Roles of Internal Stakeholders in Addressing Student Unrest

The discussion of findings in this section focuses on the perceived roles of internal stakeholders in responding to student unrest.

Administration

It emerged from the findings that the main role of administration in addressing student unrest was to prepare for potential unrest with clear protocols and developing a crisis response plan. This concurs with observations by Bimber et al. (2019) and Kezar et al. (2020) who advocated for proactive management of student unrest involving implementing crisis management plans, ensuring safety and minimising disruptions. On the other hand, Sánchez-Polo et al. (2019) points out that developing a crisis response plan should be augmented by stakeholder capacity building in crisis management to enhance preparedness and strategic crisis response. Consequently, university administration is challenged to go beyond putting in place protocols and plans by training and equipping internal stakeholders on effective management of student unrest.

The administration highlighted importance of developing policies that ensure safety, and the existence of a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning on campus. Underscoring the same point, Ostolaza et al. (2019) posit that the policies should be responsive to student needs and promote equity and social justice. This entails student involvement in decision-making process and promoting collaboration. While Ostolaza et al. (2019) propose a framework where administration has to consider students as primary stakeholders in higher education institutions, in contrast, Johnson et al. (2019) advance a framework for facilitating stakeholder collaboration, emphasising the critical work of administration to develop policies that help to align stakeholder interests and build trust among diverse groups. Building on the same note, Dewiyanti et al. (2019) and Kezar et al. (2020) challenge the administration to regularly review and update policies

to ensure they remain relevant and effective in addressing challenges. Thus, each campus crisis that unfolds should be an opportunity for administration to review the policies and statutes with the aim of establishing a more secure and safe environment for learning.

It was revealed in the study that administrators should establish a balance between opening space for freedom of expression and keeping the campus safe from violence and other destructive forms of behavior. However, Chemerinsky and Gillman (2017), and Gigliotti (2020) also challenge university administrators to navigate between upholding campus order and respecting the constitutional right for the students to free speech and peaceful assembly. For this reason, Ezarik (2021) highlights the importance of situational leadership and adaptive leadership in times of campus crisis where administration adjusts their responses based on the cause and nature of the student unrest. In addition, Pillay and Ngcobo (2022) advocate for transformative security practices in South African universities to effectively manage student protests while respecting students' rights. Therefore, seeking a balance between enforcing compliance with institutional statutes and policies while ensuring freedom of expression is a critical skill for university administration which resonates with the dynamics of situational and transformational leadership.

Faculty

The study revealed that one of the key functions of faculty in addressing the challenge of student unrest was to mentor students, including teaching them conflict resolution skills. Griffin and Griffin (2019) and Giroux (2016) underscore the same notion by observing that faculty should build close relationships with students providing guidance, encouragement and support. Additionally, Cress et al. (2019) posit that faculty members can play a pivotal role in fostering conflict resolution through mentorship, constructive dialogue with students and empowering students to address social issues. This creates a positive collaboration of faculty and students in building a positive culture of engagement and problem solving. However, Mhando and Senkubuge, (2020), Chikoko and Chimanikire (2021) observe that political polarisation in Zimbabwe complicates the management of student unrest. Political polarisation of student unions can create divisions within the faculty, with some members aligning themselves with political factions. This can compromise their ability to act as neutral mediators and undermine trust with students.

The findings also highlighted the need for more involvement of faculty in developing crisis management strategies. This position is supported by Griffin and Griffin (2019) and Giroux (2016) who emphasise the involvement

of faculty members in developing crisis management plans and providing guidance, encouragement and support to students. In contrast to these findings, Gukurume (2020) found out that traditional lecturer-student power imbalance in Zimbabwe can hinder open communication and create a climate of fear, where students are reluctant to express their grievances to faculty members. This has a potential of reducing faculty capacity and willingness to act as mentors and mediators for students. Therefore, the effective involvement of faculty in addressing student unrest is largely depended on management's ability to create an environment of mutual trust, mutual understanding and respect on campus.

Non-Teaching Staff

It emerged from the findings that non-teaching staff were comparatively closer to students than administration and faculty because of the essential services they rendered and their day-to-day interactions with students. These findings significantly concur with Tamrat & Teferra, (2021) who observe that non-teaching staff interface regularly with students by way of mentoring, advising, and providing a listening ear, offering guidance and connecting to appropriate campus resources and services. Turner and Clark (2021) stress that support staff work as counsellors, mentors, guides for students making them uniquely placed to contribute to student well-being and academic achievement. Concurring with the same position, Tamrat & Teferra, (2021) observed that non-teaching staff often serve as the point of contact for students as they express their complaints and concerns (Tamrat & Teferra, 2021). Thus, non-teaching staff have closer informal relationships with students than faculty and administrators do which positions them strategically to know student satisfaction levels and areas of concern before the situation explodes. However, Tarisayi and Chikasha (2018) report that without psychological training or institutional support, non-teaching staff are rarely effective in managing complex student grievances.

The study revealed that students oftentimes feel free to express their grievances to non-teaching staff. In line with these findings, Zhou & Walhunter, (2020) posit that the deliberate involvement of support staff may assist the authorities in responding to early warning signs of unrest thereby curbing escalations. Thus, creating a seamless communication system between non-teaching staff and administration may assist university authorities to better understand the experiences of the students and respond to their needs timeously.

The findings also revealed that university authorities should put more resources on training and resourcing non-teaching staff so that the best possible service delivery can

be rendered. Pillay and Ngcobo (2022) supports this position by emphasizing that security personnel should be trained in non-violent conflict resolution and de-escalation strategies. Anane (2022) also argues that the training and development of non-teaching staff was not being prioritised in Ghana. Therefore, investing in staff and professional development and resourcing increases quality service delivery and reduces the possibility of student unrest. All departments where service is rendered by non-teaching staff interface with students and thus play a significant role in managing student unrest.

Students and the SRC

It emerged from the findings that student participation in decision making through the Student Representative Council assisted the administration to address challenges facing students before they escalate. In support of this position, Dalton and Crosby (2020) emphasise that student participation in decision making process contributes immensely in shaping policies that address student concerns. Building on the same note, Ostolaza et al., (2019) aver that the participation of students in governance processes and institutional decision making can reduce the likelihood of unrest. Thus, when students are engaged in dialogue and participatory governance, they are more likely to co-operate with the various structures of the university in resolving campus disputes. This participation could be effected by the inclusion of students in key committees and boards to ensure that student perspectives are considered when developing policies and decisions that directly affect them.

The findings confirm that though students expressed very little confidence in the capacity of the SRC to represent them, they still believed that the SRC played a pivotal role in addressing student unrest. Pillay and Ngcobo (2022) postulate that the SRC serves as the official body through which student grievances can be aired and resolved without resorting to riotous behaviour. Additionally, the SRC serves as an official platform for students to voice their concerns, grievances, and demands including engagement of administration and policy makers to issues that affect university students (Tamrat & Teferra, 2021). Consequently, without the participation of the SRC in developing and implementing crisis management strategies, there is no meaningful address of student unrest.

The findings revealed that students felt that the SRC as highly compromised. This concurs with the findings of Zhou and Wolhuter (2020) who confirm that the SRCs in Zimbabwe often lack legitimacy among students as they are perceived as puppets of authorities. Furthermore, Garwe and Thondhlana (2019) argue that student participation is often tokenistic, with no real power to

influence policy formation. This undermines the participatory governance ideal advanced in this study. Nevertheless, the SRC serves as an official platform for students to voice their concerns, grievances, and demands including engagement of administration and policy makers to issues that affect university students (Tamrat & Teferra, 2021). Consequently, without the participation of the SRC in developing and implementing crisis management strategies, there is no meaningful address of student unrest.

4.2.2 Barriers to Internal Stakeholder Collaboration

It emerged from the findings that inter-departmental communication needed improvement, especially during crisis periods. The participants highlighted a breakdown in communication as well as miscommunication as the major challenges that impeded collaboration in crisis management. The recurring themes concerning communication challenges maybe a reflection of power dynamics and hierarchies within universities which can pose challenges to effective collaboration during a crisis. These findings are consistent with observations by Zembylas, (2019) and Lam, (2021) concerning the negative impact of power dynamics on communication and efficiency in addressing crisis in higher education. On the contrary Davis (2022) urges that toxic organizational culture is the main hindrance to stakeholder collaboration. Thus, the communication challenges highlighted in the study may be a symptom of systemic cultural issues rather than structural hindrances.

It was evident from the findings that both the faculty and staff worked within some defined parameters, and that in times of student unrest the administration took over everything, so there was no space for others to assist in any way. It emerged that each department operated within its own purview. While this engendered order and system in an institution, the challenge was that each department operated like a separate entity. Lack of co-ordination of departments is usually brought to light during a crisis event. Scholars point out that universities often have complex organizational structures with various departments, faculties, and administrative units making them vulnerable to disjointed operations (Sánchez-Polo et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2019). However, Bridoux & Stoelhorst, (2016) argues that no matter how complex a university is, investing in social capital through inter-departmental collaboration breaks down barriers and promotes stakeholder participation and productivity. Therefore, the establishment of a crisis response team comprising representatives from various departments and disciplines would bring different expertise together and increase the skills set in addressing student unrest. The

composition of the team and how best it can become operational remains to be explored.

The findings also revealed a recurring general feeling of exclusion from the process of decision making among faculty, staff and students. This situation prohibits problem solving collaboration. From the insights gathered, the general feeling of faculty, staff and students was that exclusion from the process of decision making brought about mistrust and anarchy. These findings confirm observations by Zhou and Wolhunter, (2020) that when individuals feel their contributions are undervalued or marginalised, collaboration suffers, hindering the collective progress of the university. In support of this position, Dalton and Crosby (2020) emphasise that student participation in decision making process contributes immensely to shaping policies that address student concerns. This could be effected by the inclusion of students in key committees and boards so as to ensure that student perspectives are considered when developing policies and decisions that directly affect them. On the other hand, Johnson et al. (2019) propose a framework for facilitating stakeholder collaboration which places emphasis on aligning interests and building trust rather than mere inclusion and creating room for participation. Thus, collaborative efforts should go beyond inclusion and prioritise team building and relationship-building.

The findings also revealed that the administration should place more emphasis on training, upskilling and capacity building internal stakeholders in such areas as crisis and conflict management. These findings are in line with the observations by Madondo & Mpofu (2023), Dewiyanti et al., (2019) and Davis (2022) who emphasise the importance of offering training programs, workshops, and mentoring opportunities to equip stakeholders with the necessary collaboration competencies in times of crisis. Consequently, the dynamic nature of student unrest speaks to the importance of a reciprocal change and review of strategies of addressing campus crisis. Effective training and capacity building positions the institution for sustainable management of a campus crisis.

4.2.3 Addressing Barriers to Collaboration in the Management of Student Unrest

The findings revealed that collaboration during crisis situations requires relationship building, shared understandings of issues, and collective action among all stakeholders. This concurs with study findings by Johnson et al. (2019), and Arslan and Darendeli (2020) who advocate for the importance of investing in relationship building and teamwork. The findings also echoed the need for better inter-departmental communication to enhance co-ordination and efficiency. Inclusivity and diversity in

addressing student challenges were also highlighted. However, Masenyama (2021) argue that efforts to achieve collaboration in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning are often undermined by political patronage which breeds fear and institutional paralysis. Zinyemba and Chinomona (2015) found that collaboration fails in crisis situations where trust is absent and where historical grievances remain unaddressed. Therefore, university authorities should prioritise nurturing an atmosphere that upholds tolerance, acceptance of diversity, non-partisan politics, dialogue and peace education to address political polarization of the campus.

The overall responses indicate a collective recognition among stakeholders of the barriers to collaboration in managing student unrest, particularly around communication, trust and inclusivity. There is a shared call for dialogue, open communication channels and a commitment to valuing diverse perspectives. The emphasis on creating strong support highlights the need for equipping stakeholders with the skills necessary to navigate conflicts and enhance collaboration. These insights suggest that fostering a collaborative environment requires intentional efforts to build trust, ensure inclusivity and enhance communication at all levels.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Stakeholders perceived their roles in student unrest management as follows:

- Administration was perceived as directly responsible for campus safety including the development and implementation of crisis protocols.
- Faculty was viewed as mentors and educators in conflict resolution.
- Non-teaching staff play a vital loco-parentis role due to their proximity to students as service providers.
- Students through the SRC demonstrated potential to contribute meaningfully to the management of unrest but felt disenfranchised and viewed the SRC as compromised.

Therefore, while all stakeholder groups have critical roles, their involvement was undervalued and unevenly applied, particularly that of faculty, students and non-teaching staff. A sustainable model must empower all stakeholders and

recognize their distinct contributions in conflict prevention and resolution.

The study engaged a diverse group of administrators, faculty, non-teaching staff, and students. It revealed some structural and relational barriers to effective crisis management, including mistrust, inadequate stakeholder representation and limited crisis-related training. The study also highlights critical enablers for sustainable crisis management and collaboration such as participatory structures, capacity building, transparent communication and inclusive decision-making.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on an analysis of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. University authorities should foster inclusive decision-making, capacity-building, and trust-based communication structures as a sustainable framework for crisis management in higher education.
2. Universities should prioritise developing Crisis Management Committees with equitable representation from all stakeholder groups: administration, faculty, non-teaching staff and students (including the SRC)
3. University management should facilitate the development of a regularly updated *Campus Crisis Management Manual* with clearly defined protocols, collaboration lines, intervention thresholds and authority levels.

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APPENDIX 1: Perceived Roles in Managing Student Unrest: Analysis of the Emerging Themes

Stakeholder	Key Themes	Evidence	ST Lens
Administration	Establishing a safe learning environment	<p><i>We conduct regular assessments of student' satisfaction surveys... YA2</i></p> <p><i>Prepare for potential unrest with clear protocols ... XA3</i></p> <p><i>Keep the campus safe from violence ... XA3</i></p> <p><i>Take corrective action to problems on time. XA1</i></p> <p><i>We need to keep learning from every situation ... YA2</i></p> <p><i>Invest more in building teamwork and synergies ... YA4</i></p>	High salience – administrators craft policy, lead dialogue and control resources
Faculty	Mentorship, policy crafting, research	<p><i>We are involved in crafting academic policies.. . YF3</i></p> <p><i>Mentor students and give guidance... XF4</i></p> <p><i>Conduct research on causes of unrest... YF1</i></p> <p><i>Provide feedback and develop conflict management strategies ... YF1</i></p>	<p>Salience is average in advisory role and limited in crisis management</p> <p>Legitimacy perceived as high but underutilised</p>
Staff	Mentorship, service provision	<p><i>We talk to students freely ... know their concerns... YS2, XS5</i></p> <p><i>Chief Security Officer ensures safety ... XS1</i></p> <p><i>Build relationships with SRC for peace-building ... YS1</i></p> <p><i>Need training and support... YS2</i></p> <p><i>Need resources and inclusion in planning ... YS4</i></p>	<p>Salience is average as evidenced by operational interface with students but often excluded in decision making</p> <p>Legitimacy is often questioned or unacknowledged despite frontline role</p>

Students	Articulating concerns, participating in governance	<p><i>We articulate our concerns through the SRC ... YST2:1</i></p> <p><i>Exhaust grievances procedures ...XST1:9</i></p> <p><i>Use non-violent approaches ... YST1:7</i></p> <p><i>Join university committees to be part of the solution ... XST2:5</i></p> <p><i>Push for inclusion in decision-making ... YST2:8</i></p>	High salience as evidenced by being central to the unrest. Voice often mediated by SRC. Legitimacy is often undermined, indirect participation, limited decision making power
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APPENDIX 2: Barriers to Internal Stakeholder Collaboration: Immerging Themes

Stakeholder	Key Themes	Evidence	ST Lens
Administration Faculty Students	Communication breakdown	<p><i>Sometimes there is communication breakdown between departments ... XA5.</i></p> <p><i>We need to invest in building a united team. YA1.</i></p> <p><i>When communication channels and roles are not clear, we do not know our parameters of engagement. XF2 .</i></p> <p><i>Inadequate communication from administration leaves us to guess work. It's difficult to know which direction we are taking especially during a strike YS1.</i></p> <p><i>Most of the communication is top down announcements ... XST2:4.</i></p>	Challenges legitimacy when stakeholders feel uninformed or excluded, reducing trust and engagement.
Faculty Staff Students	Hierarchical decision-making	<p><i>When there is a campus crisis, the administration takes over everything ... _XF5.</i></p> <p><i>...absence of platforms where faculty can provide feedback ... XF1.</i></p> <p><i>We often feel left out on decision making processes. Maybe the understanding is that we have very little or nothing <u>to</u> contribute. XS5.</i></p> <p><i>Even if I have a suggestion, I can only inform my immediate supervisor or my workmates. XS2.</i></p> <p><i>A lot of the time, decisions that affect students are made without</i></p>	Reduces salience and legitimacy of faculty, staff, and students, leading to disengagement.

		<i>asking us or getting our opinion.</i> YST2:8.	
Staff Administration	Lack of training and capacity building	<i>Not all of us have received training on how to handle such crises ...</i> YF2 <i>We realise that we need to invest more in building teamwork and creating synergies.</i> YA4 <i>In the midst of a student riot, we all look up to administration to give instructions...</i> XS2	Weakens effectiveness and legitimacy of staff and faculty, diminishing their role in crisis resolution.
Faculty	Departmental silos	<i>When ... roles are not clear, we do not know our parameters of engagement.</i> XF2 <i>The absence of platforms where faculty can provide feedback is a hindrance to collaboration.</i> XF1	Reduces salience of departments, weakening collaboration and collective legitimacy.

APPENDIX 3: Mitigating Barriers to Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder	Key Themes	Evidence	ST Lens
Administration	Need for open dialogue	<i>We need to dialogue with our faculty, staff and students ... provide platforms to listen to the university community.</i> YA2	Dialogue creates space for ongoing multi-stakeholder engagement and participation. The findings show a movement toward rebalancing salience.
Faculty	Importance of building trust	<i>It is essential to prioritise building trust...</i> YF3 <i>Building trust is essential for establishing a united front and fostering a collaborative approach...</i> YF5	Trust, both interpersonal and institutional, is essential for effective collaboration. These concerns point toward organisational issues of transparency, consistency and recognition.
Faculty Staff Students	Inclusivity and diversity	<i>...recognise and appreciate the contributions of others. Valuing diverse skill sets, experiences, and perspectives</i> YF1 <i>Creating a supportive environment where all voices are heard and respected ...</i> XS1 <i>Inclusivity and diversity in the development of solutions</i> XS2	The emphasis and call for inclusivity and diverse perspectives reveals a strong desire for recognition as legitimate stakeholders in crisis management. Through embracing the legitimacy of all internal stakeholders, the institution can create more effective and sustainable collaboration.

		<p><i>Ensuring that all voices are heard and valued ... YST2:3</i></p> <p><i>Embracing a range of viewpoints and experiences ... YST1: 5</i></p>	
<p>Faculty</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Staff</p> <p>Students</p>	<p>Clear communication channels</p>	<p><i>We need clear communication channels in place ... XF1</i></p> <p><i>... Improving interdepartmental communication channels is essential for enhancing collaboration and synergy. XA1</i></p> <p><i>Improved interdepartmental communication channels ... XS4</i></p> <p><i>Clear and honest communication helps to establish common ground, dispel misunderstandings ... XST1:7</i></p>	<p>Improved communication addresses both operational inefficiency and a deeper need for respect and inclusion.</p>
<p>Staff</p> <p>Students</p>	<p>Training and skills development</p>	<p><i>Investing in training and support programs for stakeholders... YS2</i></p> <p><i>Providing resources and training on conflict resolution and communication skills XST2:8</i></p>	<p>Equipping stakeholders with appropriate skills add intrinsic value and promotes better interactions. ST supports capacity-building initiatives as a way to empower stakeholder and support meaningful participation in shared governance.</p>