Managing Higher Education in the Post Fees Must Fall: Is the Centre Still Holding?

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Abstract: The advent of #Feesmustfall has brought an era of the new dawn in the management of Higher Education in South Africa. This new dawn shifts power and authority from the universities' Senior Managements, which necessitates a radical shift in the manner in which Higher Education institutions are managed. It is arguable that the student activism has brought a new regime that is characterised by student revolutionary struggle in the current trajectory. The most fundamental question is the demarcation of roles between the student organisations, Student Representative Councils (SRC's), and Senior Management of the universities, as to whether the centre is still holding. The relationship of managing the universities requires a collegial relationship between Senior Management and SRC's, and it is the intention of this paper to assess the existence of this important relationship in daily management. The paper presents the observation and praxis in the management of institutions of higher learning, with literature review that forms part of the desk top analysis. It remains the qualitative in nature and repositioning the scientific nature of the art of management in a dynamic environment such as the university. Concepts such as; student politics and governance; protest and anarchy culture; good governance; management and administration; policy implications and the role of SRCs; leadership and democratic role of universities are amongst the areas of focus of this paper. The line of enquiry remains the diagnostic factor and remedies that aims at normalising higher education institutions as centres of excellence that provide hope. The paper is expected to produce a conclusion and recommendations that reflect steps to be taken in managing the current higher education in the midst of the growing activism that is persistently shifting powers and authority of Senior Management.

Keywords: Good Governance, Leadership policy, Implications, Political management and administration, Student politics

1. Introduction

The management of any institution of higher learning requires skills that are relevant to reaffirm a multi-stakeholder' institution that is dynamic in nature. Freeman (1984, as cited in Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013) states that the old management approaches failed to take account of a wide range of groups who can affect or are affected by an organisation, namely the 'stakeholders'. The paper notes the multi-stakeholder nature of the universities as an important analysis that position universities as high concentrated conflict of ideas managed by the Senior Management that forms part of the complex nature of higher education. Wood (2000) suggests that management is an attainment of organisational goals in an effective and efficient manner through planning, organising, leading, and controlling organisational resources. Having noted the fundamentals of management, the author believes that material conditions makes it more complex to manage, hence universities have become politicised, particularly after #Feesmustfall episode, which made management to

be a mountain to climb. The predicament is the highly politicised environment that has broken the system of management controls from one party being Senior Management of the university to the students.

The radical influence of student politics in the management of universities has created a new normal situation, where decisiveness is no longer the order of the day, but management of universities are "*dancing on eggs*", negotiating how to manage. This new phenomenon necessitated by the student politics, which Burawoy (1985:253, as cited in Badat, 2016) defines politics as "struggles over or within relations of structured domination, struggles that take as their objective the quantitative or qualitative change of those relations". The struggles defined above are about access and observed not being anything to also do with the success, and bolster around competition for power through the mass struggles. The antics of the situation reaffirms a new approach to manage Higher Education from what students have viewed as a "dictatorship by the minority" referring to senior management of

the university. However, the management approach of the modern Higher Education embraces the students, which in the context of this paper, student centered universities defines new approaches to management. This blends what Luescher and Klemencic (2016) suggest that universities would not exist without students. Students are at the heart of the academic enterprise. The argument blends the era of neo-managerialism, Luescher and Klemencic (2016) posit that there is a need to carefully examine the appropriate role for students in universities, which is necessary in a period of dramatic and often traumatic change for Higher Education, but is not an easy task. At the centre of the paper, the most important element is to determine precisely how SRC's and student movements feed into the architect of management of Higher Education with more focus on evidence based to argue the existence of the literature. The paper contributes to the scientific knowledge in the management discourse of Higher Education in difficult times.

## 2. Student Politics and Institutional Governance

Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended, reaffirms that in the democratic Higher Education institution there shall be an SRC, with an intention to represent the views of the student in the institutional governance. These SRCs are a manifestation of student movements and activism in nature of which this section of the paper intends to make an introspection of its historic evolutions and the current trajectory of neo-managerialism of Higher Education in the post #Feesmustfall era. It is difficult to reflect on historic evolution of student movements without engaging on the historic transition from the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) to South African National Students' Congress (SANSCO) guided by the oppressed politics of the South Africa that had connectivity with the apartheid regime in the period 1968-1990. In the review of literature, Badat (2016) note that in both scholarly and popular literature, black students in South Africa have tended to be treated in two ways. In accounts of educational conditions, they have frequently been characterised simply as victims of apartheid. It is therefore in affirmation that connectivity of the key student movement of the time was about liberation of an Africa child in the educational struggle that is about class contradictions in the broader society. During apartheid, higher education was 'designed to entrench the power and privilege

of the ruling white minority' (Bunting 2004:52, as cited by Heleta, 2016).

It is paramount that concepts be defined, which connect where the SRC emerge out of. According to Badat (2016) frequently, key concepts such as "student organisation", "student movement" and "student body" are not defined and are conflated, even though they are conceptually distinct. The similarities can be drawn between the student movement through ideological context, which a student organisation is a group that drives the movement. The paper notes the connectivity of the two concepts, but also underscores that student bodies are the embodiment of the constituencies which student organisation draws its membership from. In support of the distinct assertion of the paper as Jenson (2018) argues that the movement covers an extremely wide range of ideologies and concrete activities. There are political interest and pressure groups. The pressure groups identified manifest from the student bodies, and swell the ranks of student organisation with an effort to influence the direction of the movement, which evolves overtime from generations to generations. It is also important to note that these concepts, the evolvement is not complete without political ideology. This paper assumes that the distinct nature of these concepts connect into the new generations of struggles in universities that always look into Higher Education as a systemic phenomenon. Figure 1 demonstrates the connectivity of the concepts.

In the narrative presented above, it is difficult to conclusively have student politics without the existence of the student bodies, and interest groups. Student bodies constitute a diverse alternative view to advance democratic space. Petracca (2018) states that during the past decade, political scientists have rediscovered interest groups as a suitable subject for study resulting in an avalanche of new empirical data on various aspects of the interest group system. The author note social interest groups as socially constructed engines of democratic horizon opening, which provide a space for inclusive ideologically cohesive set-up of student movements that has changing patterns and addresses politics of recent audience. Zald (2017) explains that where social movement participation was commonly analysed as spontaneous and enthusiastic, and, by some analysts, out of the ordinary, it is now mostly analysed as a form of rational, normal behaviour, subject to the decision-making constraints of all behaviour,

Figure 1: Connectivity of Student Governance and Politics
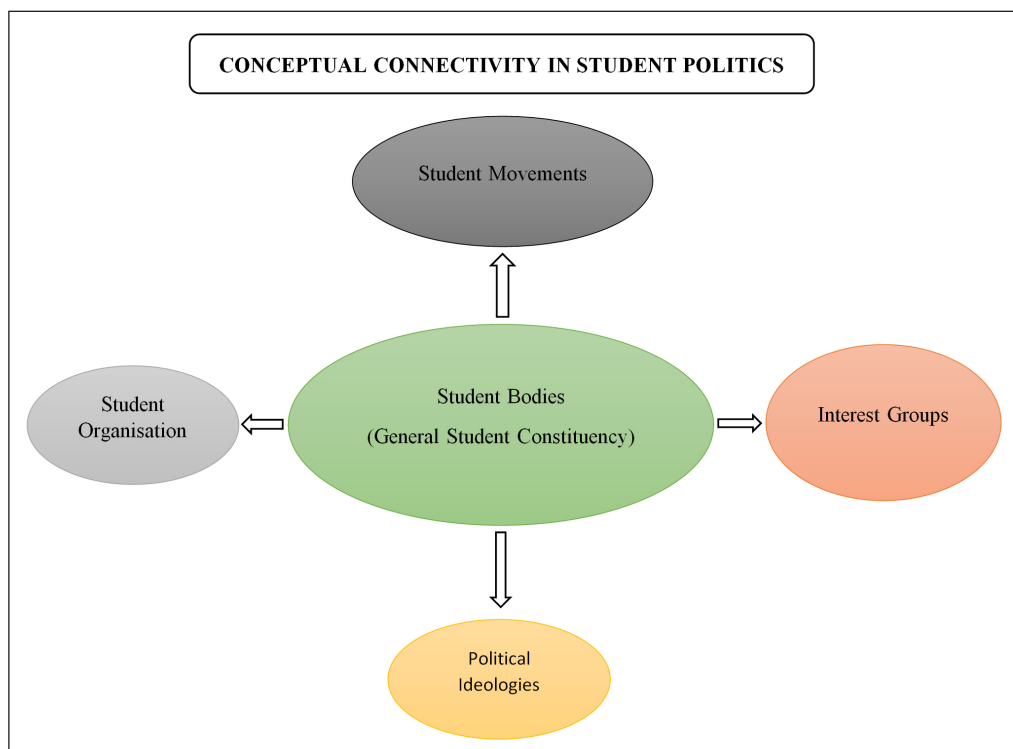
Source: Author

which this paper posits that student movements in the recent student governance preoccupy student interests. The interest of these generations is beyond party political ideology as an important tenant of focus that note student governance that is more than its connectivity with mainstream politics. Therefore, ideology in this new normal student governance constitutes only an ideological debate that does not find the expression in the student movements as they are actions generation. The students' movements are integral part of efforts to attack any liberal policy stands that focuses on the maintenance agenda of a neoliberal Higher Education system, and therefore, it is difficult to address conceptual overview of student movements without unpacking liberal systemic rot of neoliberal policy system. Cabalin (2012) underscores that students were transformed into political actors. Their opinions and discourses are part of the educational public discussion. Neoliberal 'common sense' is no longer the only paradigm. This paper observes that these student movements gather students from various ideological points of view to more specifics. In the midst of understanding the magnitude of student movements, the student organisation is a sub-group of student politics that is more ideological and at some points its influence to the mainstream politics weakens their ability to attack the status quo. The

new normal era of student governance is characterised by movements that transcend from student organisation, which is more of solidarity towards a pervasive radical specific dismantling of maintenance agenda. This allows a question of the power of solidarity than single handed student organisation that has more issues to tackle without success over a period of time.

In the midst of this important argument, where does this put institutional governance? Institutional governance is a strategic stakeholder's management, which Kettunen (2015) argues that stakeholder maps are essential in quality assurance, because higher education institutions must identify the most important stakeholders to collect feedback from the stakeholder relationships and improve their processes. The observation of student movements undermines existing protocols of institutional governance and subjects all consultations to mass mobilisation, which often brought stand-off, and anarchy in universities than constructive stakeholders' engagements.

3. Protest Culture and Anarchy in Higher Education

The protest culture goes long way in higher education based on the historic narrative of apartheid

system in South Africa. However, the beginning of democracy provides an era where student movements were about intellectualising the student struggles. The study of protest is an embodiment of social movements, which Juris (2015) argues that protest cultural approaches to the study of social movements are by now well ensconced in the pantheon of social movement theory as the field has moved beyond the overly rationalist, materialist, and institutional biases of resource mobilisation and early political process traditions. In the interest of literature review, social movements represent the political atmosphere that adds pressure to the pressing issue of the time. Zald (2017:11) posits that where social movement participation was commonly analysed as spontaneous and enthusiastic, and, by some analysts, out of the ordinary, it is now mostly analysed as a form of rational, normal behaviour, subject to the decision-making constraints of all behaviour. The paper underscores that the pervasive of student movements is perceived negative, while lack of transformative decisions that are prolonged serves as agitation to students' activists to mobilise across political lines. This phenomenon is not new, but happens everywhere the society is tired of the waiting game of the ruling class. Badat (2016) note that human rights exist for every one's protection against people who might want to dehumanise other people. Accordingly, human rights exist to help people get along with each other peacefully in society or within an institution. The student protest culture has been part of the system in the apartheid, and post 1994 era made it formal through the right to protest. The interest of the paper ultimately assesses the culture of the impact of these protests. The student movements moved from the protest culture to anarchy as Ward (2017:III) argues that anarchism is a political or social ideology, which has two separate origins. It can be seen as an ultimate derivative of liberalism or as a final end of socialism. The paper notes the prolonged socialist perspective policy position that transform higher education to the advantage of the working class and the peasants as a governmental source of anarchy, which encourages social movement to persist in the interest of putting pressure to the ruling class.

The phenomenon of anarchy is a manifestation of an extreme radical political discourse that militancy, which if unguided always becomes the order of the day. In support, the literature posits as Williams (2017) states that what would happen if a college instructor asks students to design their own syllabus, figure out what to learn, and run a class on their own? In another words, how would a classroom work if established on anarchist principle? These fundamental questions paint picture that is not rosy as observed in student protests in the context of the fallists' movements. The actions of these fallists' movements have been observed as a total takeover of governance and management of universities to the masses (students), and collapse for institutional governance, which intimidation and target to the authorities has been the character of the movements and student protests post Feesmustfall times. In essence, the question remains, if governing and managing the universities, is the principles of management and governance holding.

4. Shift in Management of Higher Education

It is important to determine the application of management tools by the Senior Executive of universities to determine the thesis of the paper, which is centred on whether the centre is holding. Cini (2016) argues that competitive within the market of higher education, are generally more concerned about neutralising potential challengers, who might damage the reputation and functioning of the university. In dealing with student mobilisations, then, academic managers are more likely to be confrontational and repressive than academics. The paper underscores confrontation as the methodology of traditional and authoritative way of managing higher education. However, the fundamental question is whether post Feesmustfall era, the university management still have boldness to confront students as a tool of management? The phenomenon of managing universities becomes a conflict space, which Putnam (2006:1) views conflict as it culminates by explicating the role of communication in conflict as a variable, a process, an interpretation or meaning, and a dialectical relationship. The paper note the pressure that university management are confronted with, having to negotiate their work with students because of fear of intimidation and decision by chaos. The diagnosis of the situation is that management of the universities are shifting from being managers to negotiators. Golann and Folberg (2016) state that each have their own approach to how they negotiate, rooted in their values, assumptions, experiences, goals, and the nature of the situation, which competitive and cooperative categories of negotiation styles are identified. In summary, the first approach uses a bargaining

methodology and the later applies problem solving methodology. The question is which category the university management uses posts Feesmustfall? The paper argues that it is often that management are negotiators and often applies competitive approach. This is mainly because they are no longer firm, but "dancing on eggs" because they fear intimidation by student movements. Value chain of management and governance has lost value as power relations are shifting. Foucault (1982) argues that in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations. It is the view of the paper that the resistance is about the mimic of socialist education without implementation and policy reforms. However, the student movements identify management of the universities as immediate enemies and the government as "chief enemy". Foucault (1982) further argues that they do not look for the "chief enemy" but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date (that is, liberations, revolutions, and end of class struggle).

It is also important to put a different picture of shift of strategies of management of the universities, not only about one class against the other. It is for so many years that universities have been mimic about being "student centred". Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) underscore that if education is to be truly student-centred, students should be consulted about the process of learning and teaching. Moreover, within the current higher education climate, it is imperative that institutions move from an 'inside out' approach, where those on the inside 'know' what is best, to an 'outside in' approach where customers' expectations are researched and serviced. The paper assumes a definition of universities as centres of excellence, which must take into consideration the socio-economic conditions and backgrounds where the students comes from in assuming negotiation as a methodology of managing universities and a posture of showing compassion to challenges within which students are facing. While recognising that education is a public asset, the students assume their ownership and argue against conventional methods of teaching, learning and support. Stefani, Clarke and Littlejohn (2000) reaffirm that one of the goals of higher education is to enable students to become autonomous independent learners. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to shift our emphasis from teaching to facilitating effective learning and to promote the

concepts of ownership and 'reflection on learning'. The daily activities in the institution are a driving force of the student movements settling to bully the system to transform urgently to realise the ultimate needs of the poor students in campuses.

5. Leadership and Democratic Role of Universities

Higher Education requires strong and dynamic leadership to implement the decisions of governing structures, which often meet resistance of student movements. According to Anderson and Sun (2017), a central topic in leadership research concerns the impact of leadership style – the pattern of attitudes that leaders hold and behaviours they exhibit. Since the year 2000, several new leadership styles have been proposed to capture important missing aspects beyond the dominant charismatic/transformational and transactional framework. In the context of the leadership required in higher education, the management becomes fragile of the tension that always exists between managing for institutional sustainability and popularity among student movements. University authorities understand the historic narrative of the higher education, which Hammack and Pilecki (2015) argue by these fundamental questions that "can history, however, serve as a tool for social and political change, rather than simply reproduce the status quo? Can certain forms of historical dialogue promote peace and social justice for groups in conflict?" All these questions require that a new approach to leadership in managing universities be identified to address the current trajectory in higher education. The paper note *"Agility"* as the advance leadership skill that is required recently by Senior Management in higher education, which constitutes a foregrounded leadership that projects dynamics and manage them before they become risk and anarchy. Beck and Lengnick-Hall (2016) posit that an organisation's resilience capacity captures its ability to take situation-specific, robust, and transformative actions when confronted with unexpected and powerful events that have the potential to jeopardise an organisation's long-term survival. Strategic agility is a complex, varied construct that can take multiple forms but captures an organisation's ability to develop and quickly apply flexible, nimble, and dynamic capabilities. The paper notes "adaptability" as another method that may have effect to management of universities in the post Feesmustfall era.

"I felt discouraged at work, too. I wanted to be productive, but my personal struggles and the typical challenges of starting graduate school got in the way. I now realise that I was trying to rush things, but at the time, my lack of research progress made me feel even more discouraged about my decision to go to grad school abroad. Several times I felt like giving up and flying home". Kumar (2016).

The experience of Kumar paints a picture of a fragile situation at work and in life that university senior management are confronted with on the daily basis of managing universities. Sense of worthless and lack of fulfilment is always surrounding them in the post Feesmustfall era. The art of leading the university requires problem solving etiquettes, since solving problems and crisis is the *modus operandi* in the current trajectory in higher education. Megheirkouni (2016) argues that organisational leadership requires decision making and problem solving to ensure completing objectives, rather than decline, which are what leaders do for their companies in the business world. The paper notes the pervasiveness of crisis mode of higher education and reposition agility and adaptability as key to resolve the crisis mode of higher education and universities in particular.

One other key aspect of the enquiry is whether universities are democratic spaces and their role in deepening democracy. Hoffman, Domagal-Goldman, King and Robinson (2018) state that in recent decades, higher education's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts have encouraged students to view themselves as having a significant stake in government, politics, and the welfare of people beyond their immediate social circles. The paper asserts that students are primary stakeholders of the universities and social agents that have the role to play in the societal transformation. Indicators of democracy is argued by the paper as decolonisation project and curriculum transformation, which Heleta (2016) proclaims that since the end of the oppressive and racist apartheid system in 1994, epistemologies and knowledge systems at most South African universities have not considerably changed; they remain rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western worldviews and epistemological traditions. The curriculum remains largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege. It is therefore that promotion of African scholarship and indigenous education represent curriculum transformation, which at the centre reposition universities as spaces that promotes democracy.

6. Co-Operative Governance and Policy Implication

Democratic Higher Education systems of governance are based on inclusive governance as a result of Higher Education act 101, of 1997 as amended. However, managing Higher Education is an implementation arm of governance to eliminate governance risk. Neary and Winn (2016) under false dichotomy argue that the relationship between the University and the State, is highly significant, which the paper underscores that the Higher Education act as stated above emerge from epistemological orientation that recognises that Higher Education governance manifest from various constituencies. From the construct, Sebola (2017) states that governance today seem to have achieved much as a model of management where good interaction with stakeholders, whether being internal or external, has been achieved with accountability and transparency being at the fore. The model of cooperative governance in the context of this paper creates an environment of co-existence of stakeholders with a clear intention of opening and encouraging engagements on principle and matters of common interest. The recognition of shift in the post Feesmustfall era proclaims a takeover necessitated by no rationale due to the socio-economic conditions of the society that constitute the external environment within which the universities operates. The shift from liberal policies that govern higher education to the democratic dispensation is a symbolic of recognition of the previously the excluded groups and to stay focus with the paper, the student component that was never taken into confidence in the governing of the universities. It is against this background that Alshaerb, Al-Hila, Al Shobaki and Abu Naser (2017) argue that governance is an essential platform for increasing the level of partnership between universities and civil society organisations so that through governance, it is possible to benefit from the strengths of some universities in the development of university education and to reduce the weaknesses of some universities. Alshaerb *et al.* (2017) posit that implementing the principles of governance is a tool to improve the environment of transparency and to produce high-quality reports, so that these reports are comprehensive, accurate and provide timely information in order to make good decisions. The paper note that co-operative governance is a result

of policy shift that ushered democratic ethos into the higher education system. However, the empirical evidence in the Feesmustfall era presents a picture of power struggle to management the institution, with element of cooperativeness are always "*hitting the snack*".

7. New-Normal Higher Education

Higher Education governance and management is confronted by the disruptive patterns that are pervasive and undermines the relationship of co-existence between student leadership and management of the university, which the paper characterises it as an era of new-normal. The paper notes that the day to day activities of managing higher education requires the knowledge of the theory underpinning its existence. Raisio and Lundström (2017) proclaim that, at times, the administrative sciences have boldly stepped into the unknown, taking lessons from popular culture, which the paper notes the new normal experience marked by chaos and disruption which undermines the essence and value of stability in managing universities. In review of the literature, the paper note chaos theory orientation as a narrative orientation of this new normal higher education. Chaos theory has been used to explain the problematic nature of classical administrative theories (Morgan, 2006, as cited in Raisio and Lundström, 2017). The paper assumes that managing universities is a transformation task in the current era of democracy, which should resemble principles and aspirations of an organised environment conducive for learning. Simard, Aubry and Laberge (2018) posit that images of utopia of order and chaos can serve to depict paradoxes observed in projects by illustrating the ongoing challenges presented by formal organisation and informal social structure at the interface of temporary/permanent organising. It is therefore that the analysis of the new normal higher education serves as a reflection of growth of democracy and social class reflection of the society. The most difficult question is whether Higher education as a social transformation project was ever prepared to adapt to this new transition, particularly having taken long to realign with the transformation trajectory of democracy particularly eroded from the funding model and curriculum that is anti the era of time? In essence, students are change agents in the new normal higher education to speed-up transformation of higher education. Collins, Hawkins and Flowers (2018) underscore that student interventionists have been utilised as change agents in a

variety of contexts to improve the academic, social, and communicative behaviours of target students. A new normal higher education give rise to the emergence of new character of student activism, which in essence, Jacoby (2017) argues that the "new student activism," as it is often called, is a hot topic in higher education as well as in the popular press and social media. At the centre, new normal higher education has created generic platforms of comparison throughout the system, which made student activists to position campus issues at national level to collapse the sector. This interconnectivity of university student activism culture has never been experienced before than now. It is conclusive that the new normal higher education is a ticking bomb that needs to be handled with care for forging peace and stability on university campuses.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

#Feesmustfall is tabled in this paper to demonstrate the dynamics of managing higher education specially shifting of power from management of the universities to the student activists. The slow transformation of higher education necessitated students finding new opportunities to embrace their day to day experiences through mobilising beyond political lines to reposition their long standing demands. The methodological protest culture of the student movements has been identified as the new normal era that is dramatic marked by continuing anarchy to push the oppressive system in higher education. The situation is presented as being stressful and position management as negotiators than that of managers who are experienced with running academia. #Feesmustfall is presented as a student movement with no fear of reprisal by any forces that seek to undermine the call they are making. The paper demonstrated that the long standing call for socialist education was continuously a rhetoric and caused the delay to progress, however, the student movement brought a realisation of student centred universities and deepen democracy in higher education. It is recommended that the "*new normal*" higher education requires "*agility*" and "*adaptability*" as new set of leadership style to manage universities. Kong, Wang, Ma, and Lu (2019) argue that "*Soft set theory*" is a good tool to deal with uncertain problems. The paper adopts the two leadership styles because they are both requiring application of soft power to manage the universities and dismantle aggressiveness, anarchy, and stand-off.

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