



“Fees Must Fall Campaign” in Higher Institutions of Learning: Understanding Staff Perceptions in University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Nompumelelo Chiliza¹; Samson Adeoluwa Adewumi²; Bhekabantu Ntshangase²

¹ School of Management, Information Technology & Governance, University of Kwazulu -Natal, South Africa

² Faculty of Management Sciences, Mangosuthu University of Technology, South Africa

Email: adewumi.samson@mut.ac.za; nompumellmdunge@gmail.com; ntshangase.alson@mut.ac.za

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Abstract

Three South-African Universities, including University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), constantly witnessed students’ protests because of yearly increment in tuition fees. In 2015/2016, an announcement of 10.5% tuition fee increment incited an even higher level of protests among students. Research on the perception of the impact of fees must fall campaign (FMFC), especially among university staff, remains minimal to date. The purpose of this study is to analyse the impact of the FMFC on the perception of academic staff of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Staff perceptions contribute significantly to the success and failure of the university or any organization. Data were elicited through a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews. The target population for this study were academic staff sampled from UKZN. A total of 20 academic staff were recruited with the convenient sampling approach. The NVivo (v.12) qualitative software was employed for the identification of themes and sub-themes while the content qualitative analytical tool was employed to make sense of the themes. The results of the study showed that the #FMFC decreased the quality of education; lectures were suspended for days; and the #FMFC caused disruption on campus for a substantial numbers of times. Concerns were also that the image of the university had been negatively affected, and they felt unsafe. The study recommend the need for the injection of more funds through scholarship and bursary to cushion the effect of the increase in tuition fees, especially for the less-privileged students in order to tame the tide of consistent #FMFC protests.

Keywords: *Tuition Fees; Students; Protests; Perception; Violence; University*

1. Introduction

Universities in South, including the University of Cape Town, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Rhodes and Stellenbosch have consistently witnessed students’ protests emanating from annual increments in tuition fees (Pillay, 2016). In the 2015/2016 academic year, a 10.5% tuition fee increment

was announced by the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) provoking an even higher protests amongst students (Booyesen, 2018). These protests escalated and resulted in the destruction of properties culminating into the forceful shutdown of the institution by the university management (Booyesen, 2018). Students at other universities in South Africa joined the protest in solidarity with tier counterparts at Wits, eventually resulting into nationwide students' protests. The aftermath of the nationwide protests was the demand for free education across public universities in South Africa, hence the popular cliché "Fees Must Fall". According to Mitchell, Leachman and Masterson (2017) the "Fees Must Fall Campaign" (#FMFC) resulted in several concerns for the university employees, including job loss, retrenchment, demotions and redundancy. Mitchell et al., (2017) further argued that with the ascending growth of these concerns, employees were voluntarily resigning from their jobs.

The managements at the various universities were vehemently against the #FMFC with the contention that it possess harm to university administration. With evidence of underfunding of public universities in South Africa, a #FMFC can births compromise on the quality of education delivered (Linden, 2018). In the opinion of Luescher (2016), the importance of employees' wellness cannot be overstretched. However, continuous feelings of insecurity on the part of employees' owing to #FMFC protests could lead to less commitment and accumulated stress, with probable decreased job satisfaction and high turnover rates respectively (Abraham, 2017). Van-Niekerk (2016) explains that the consequence of the #FMFC might have been grievous for universities in the long terms, possibly leading to inefficiency and ineffectiveness of university employees'. In effect, this could impact on the quality and numbers of graduates produced and the volume of knowledge production. For Makhanya (2017), abrupt organizational change poses greater demand on academics as a result of the increasing students-teacher ratio which diminishes the overall students' experience, particularly for indigent students.

The concerns of students' protests emanating from the #FMFC have continued to draw the attention of commentators, policy analysts and other stakeholders in South Africa. Abraham (2017) argued that #FMFC has roused several protests in South Africa culminating into financial lost and damages to properties. These occurrences have left the academics highly frustrated and demotivated as they are had to work overtime in order to complete their syllabus. Frustration of the academic staff, and the continuous disruptions of classes could also lead to high turnover rates if not properly controlled by the university management (Bosch, 2017). The case of #FMFC in UKZN has engendered disruptions of the academic calendar and colossal damages to property in recent times.

In addition, the UKZN library on the Howard College campus was burnt by protesting students during this period. On the Westville campus, the administrative building, the risk management service building, students' residences and some lecture halls were all burnt. The enormous damages to properties rouse a perception of fear around the safety of academic staff such that classes were suspended during the #FMFC (Joseph, 2017). #FMFC protests in UKZN have led to many disruptions and difficulties not only in terms of financial cost and damages, but in terms of perceptions to academic staff with regards to personal insecurities since protest are associated with violence and dwindled job security.

There are existing writings on students' protests arising from tuition fees and other concerns in South Africa. For example, Abraham's (2017) study interrogated #FMFC and students' revolution in South Africa; Badat (2016) examined the meaning and explanation of the South African higher education protests; Butler-Adam's (2015) analysis attempted an understanding of the decline and fall of the South African universities arising from students protests. In what can be seen as a similar but distinct study is Luescher, Loader and Mugume (2017) interrogation of #FMFC through integral students' movements. The contention from these is the sparsity of studies in understanding academic staff perceptions of the #FMFC with particular reference to UKZN. In order words, while existing studies on #FMFC have been examined through the implication of students' protests on the development and growth of the university in South Africa, hardly has any study give focus to the concern and perceptions of academic staff within

the context of UKZN. This gap clearly forms the motivation for this study. Therefore, the objectives of this paper is to determine staff perceptions of the impact of the #FMFC on UKZN and assess the effect of the #FMFC on UKZN's academic staff responsibilities.

The chief contribution of this study to knowledge is the examination of academic staff perceptions of the #FMFC. It is instructive to argue that the array of students protests and #FMFC narratives have largely been concentrated on the implications of these protests on the university, leaving issues as its affect the academic staff perceptions and responsibilities. Therefore, with the interrogation of this narrative, it is likely to provoke a more nuance analysis of the #FMFC discourse in the broad canon of students' conflict-management. Essentially, this contention takes the position that the analysis of academic staff perceptions of #FMFC offers important yardstick for a fuller understanding of the implications of students protest within the context of the university system. After a brief background to #FMFC, the paper turns to explain staff perceptions of the impact of the #FMFC. In what follows was the interrogation of the effect of #FMFC on academic staff responsibilities. The different methodology were explicitly explained and the NVivo (v.12) qualitative software employed to identify various themes and sub-themes. The study makes a case for the democratization and management of students conflicts through robust joint consultative forum.

2. Background to the Fees Must Fall Campaign

The year 2015 witnessed frequent and debilitating consequences of students' protests over tuition fees in South Africa, together with the emergent debates around the funding of higher education. The new impression of the #FMFC protests that erupted early in the year 2015 at UKZN and several other South African universities, the principle of university autonomy, academic freedom and freedom of expression remain of interests to public analysts (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015). These demonstrations, as with the recent eruption of students' protests in several South African universities include reactions to apparent persistent aggravation, stigmatization and questions of distinctiveness induced by the feelings of satisfaction in universities (Mngomezulu, Dhunpath & Munro, 2017). Acrimonious discourses, primarily related to race and class were first to the Rhodes University Fees Must Fall Campaign and transformation request were deemed necessary to decolonize and Africanize South African universities (Bosch, 2017). This spread to reverse a campaign of outsourcing of university support staff and to the #FMFC originally as opposition to the rise in annual fees for tertiary education, but gradually to demands for free tertiary education (Bosch, 2017).

3. Staff perception of the impact of the Fees Must Fall Campaign

The academic staff perception of the impact of #FMFC is discussed through the prism of the Social Cognitive and Attribution Theories. The fulcrum of Social Cognitive Theory is how education arises in a societal context, with the mutual communication of the individual, situation and behaviour (Dagnall, Drinkwater, Parker, Denovan & Parton, 2015). One of the main features of the Social Cognitive Theory is explained by social influence and its prominence in internal and external social reinforcement (Dagnall et al., 2015). The Social Cognitive Theory takes particularly into account an individual's past experiences, with a keen consideration of whether behavioural actions will follow (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015). Therefore, past experiences influence reinforcement and expectations, which determine whether and how a person engages in a specific behaviour, and for which reasons. The veracity of the Attribution Theory is explained by the individual use of social information in arriving at causal explanations for events and circumstances in their everyday lives (Gawronsky & Branon, 2019). Specifically, the assumption of the Attribution Theory deals with the nature of information gathered, and how it is applied in forming a causal explanation of events (Gawronsky & Branon, 2019).

Taking into account the plausibility of these two hypothesis, employees who view the organisation from the perspective of a healthy citizen of the social sphere with ethical standards, will have deeper appreciation and emotional connection to the organisation, becoming more dedicated to their work (Lind, 2017). It is possible that the reputation perceived by workers is positive to enhance workflow commitment. For instance, within the context of this study, employees who feel positive about the good reputation of the university, such as when devoid of constant students' protests, will have increased workflow commitment. On the other hand, employees with negative feelings regarding the reputation of the university, following incessant student protests, will no doubt decrease workflow commitment. Several beliefs and evaluations generate each antecedent.

Attitude is the overall positive or negative assessment of a specific behaviour by a person after assessing the perceived implications of a specific behaviour or action (Lind, 2017). If the participants perceive that the university violence makes their workplace unsafe, their attitudes towards the university will be negative. To place it into perspective, the Cognitive Consistency Theory implies that when contradictions cause conflicts, a person seeks psychological equilibrium (Nixon et al., 2015). By seeking psychological equilibrium, academic staff need to balance work life during protests at workplace (UKZN) and finding ways to continue performing their daily duties even under the threats from #FMFC that is associated with violence.

Hinojosa, Gardner, Walker, Coglisier and Gullifor (2017) added that, if employees recognize a favourable repute identified with their universities, they are more likely to produce belief-consistent identity feelings, such as continuing to work at the university. Staff are also more likely to support several voluntary, extra-role behaviours to advance service delivery, or deliver valued submissions to the university. Employees who perceive a high ethical behaviour of their university will be driven to perform as constructive representatives for the institution, devoting in order to increase performance and efficacy (Hinojosa, et al., 2017). Employees who perceive a good-treatment repute will create better job fulfilment, commitment and retention for the university (Lind, 2017). Staff from South African universities are faced with more uncertainties in their daily activities, reduced job security, and scant prospects of continued employment (Bodhlyera, De Beer & Pienaar, 2017). Employees expect UKZN to create a pleasant workspace, providing a safe working environment, and a balance between work and obligations of staff out of the workplace.

4. The effect of #FMFC on academic staff responsibilities

The rising costs of higher education in South Africa has been provoking decreasing opportunities for many South Africans (Langa et al., 2017). Multiple students from families with low socio-economic status pursue higher education as an instrument to interrupt obstructions to inter-generational movement and development (Linden, 2018). Such progression is thus propelled by shared discourses about education as an answer to poverty and undermined by section 29 of the South African constitution Act 108 of 1996, which "affirms the right to basic and further education" (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Notwithstanding the nuanced conceptions of access to and success through higher education, expectations of education being "provided" are resonant with a notion of a culture of entitlement. Mngomezulu et al., (2017) argued that such often accompanied movement and mind-set of political-education agitation. However, the pursuit of education and consequence emancipation from poverty may have unforeseen consequences for academic achievement and results (Joseph, 2017).

During the #FMFC protests for example, the UKZN administration buildings were occupied for two weeks by the protestors demanding the rights that were refused to others (Mpofu, 2017). Laws were broken, while expecting others to meet legal requirements (Hodes, 2017). In South Africa, the

affordability of higher education remain a challenge, owing to declining State funding in real terms (reducing by 1.1 per cent from 2000 to 2012), and the low portion of gross domestic product going to higher education (around 0.9 per cent) (Langa et al., 2017). Academic activities were postponed, and the university calendar was extended to cover time that were lost during strike because other days protesting students were blocking the lecture venues and burning of some of the universities' properties and it was not safe for the staff to be at work. Protests against universities were then appropriately extended to the corruption and incompetence of the fourth democratic president of South Africa and his administration, who had cut subsidies to universities (Hodes, 2017). At the beginning of the 2016 academic year, the Rhodes Must Fall protests were renewed. Protests, *inter-alia*, included the burning of university buses, paintings and artwork from some of the student residences; and a petrol bomb attack on UKZN's Howard College library (Molefe, 2016).

The long-term implications of the #FMFC events for South African universities resulted in much anxiety, especially about the UKZN staff workload. In South African, the #FMFC protests are reminiscent of escalating students' disruptions and associated popular pressure in the Apartheid era that promoted academic boycotts, and the removal of and obstruction to freedom of speech (Butler-Adam, 2015). According to this view, the dominant concepts of morals, politics, religion, law, philosophy, and art of any society are the ideas of the dominant economic class (Jalagat, 2016). Criticisms have been levelled at universities from diverse perspectives. Some critics portray academics and universities as politically conservative and co-opted into the 'system' by subsidies and research grants from governments; and by the approval of academics' domination of their disciplines (Butler-Adam, 2015). Others claim that liberal universities no longer foster the open-mindedness required for true scholarship; and that they are becoming increasingly partisan to left-wing views, rather than remaining neutral (Joseph, 2017).

5. Methodology and methods

The case-study design approach was employed as the design for this study. The case-study permits an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon within its natural settings (Wilson, 2016). The goal is the retrieval of information from a unit or organisation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The single-case design was employed in this study with a focus on the single case of UKZN. This design is robustly justified in a qualitative study of this nature to qualitatively unearth the experiences of selected academic staff at UKZN regarding their understanding and perception of #FMFC. The choice of the qualitative research is well justified with the aim of provoking an in-depth understanding of academic staff perceptions of the impact of the #FMFC. A qualitative research becomes the most relevant in investigating staff perceptions and human behaviour, which are dynamic and subject to change. For instance, the qualitative method becomes crucial since human perceptions can only be explored using appropriate qualitative research tool, rather than the measurement of constructs.

The population of study comprised academics spread across two campuses of UKZN including the Howard and Westville campus respectively. However, a total of 20 academic staff were sampled and interviewed for this study. This sample size is appropriately justified to engender deep qualitative responses to address the questions raised in this study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). For sample recruitment, the convenience sampling being a sub-set of the non-probability sampling technique, was employed for the recruitment of academic staff. In other words, academic staff were recruited as participants based on availability and readiness to participate in the study. The recruited academic staff were approached via emails requesting their participation and consents were thereafter granted indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

The data collection began with scheduling different appointments dates with the selected academics. Through this medium, participants were adequately briefed and informed of their voluntary participation and the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point they wish to do so. The in-depth face-to-face interview type was employed to elicit data from respondents, while the questions were all carefully worded to avoid ambiguity and repetition of questions and responses (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013). The interview were conducted for a period of six weeks with each interview lasting between 20-30 minutes. All the responses were audio-taped for which consent had been sought prior to the commencement of the interview (Creswell, 2014). Handwritten and summary notes were also documented in areas where the audio tape is not explicit for transcribe. An interview guide was used to guide the flow of questions and responses. This was to ensure uniformity in the questions posed to all respondents.

The reliability and validity of the qualitative data obtained were ensured through the adoption of the Trochim and Donnelly's (2007) four strategic approaches including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of data respectively. Credibility was ascertained by ensuring that the data and results appropriately reflects the opinions and perceptions of all the respondents. The transferability of data was ascertained by stimulating the transferability of results to similar results context when replicated. On dependability of data, the data collection procedures appropriately complied with all ethical consideration in data collection and reporting of the findings. For confirmability of data, an attempt was made to establish a synergy between the results and data sets. The NVivo (v.12) qualitative software was employed to identify themes and sub-themes from the transcribe interview and these themes were analysed with the content qualitative analytical tool.

On ethics, the study followed strict compliance to ethics wherein the names and identity of the academic staff were protected during the data collection and reports of findings. In addition, the study was duly approved by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal with protocol number HSS/0582/016M. One of the limitation of the methodology is the challenge of access to selected academic members, particularly as regard the conduct of a face-to-face interview. After much persuasion, swift attention was granted and this challenge was addressed.

6. Data analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Themes and Sub-themes

	Research Objectives	Themes
1	To determine staff perception of the impact of the #FMFC	Fees to be abolished, damage to properties, safety concern and financial constraints
2	To assess the effect of the #FMFC on academic staff responsibilities	Decreased educational resources, lower standard of education, fear and intimidation, increased workload and uncertainties

Source: NVivo qualitative analysis

6.1 Staff Perception of the Impact of the #FMFC

Academic staff perception of the impact of the #FMFC cut across many issues as explained by the majority of the academics interviewed. For instance, the general perception shared reflect the demand by the protesting students to abolish the payment of tuition fees in all South African public universities. While this demand can be seen a component part of the fundamental human right of students to free speech and opinions, researchers and public analysts have contended that the quest to abolish tuition fees is impractically impossible as no country in the world abolishes tuition fees. The argument was that, government can only subsidize education in order to reduce the over-bearing burden of tuition on students

and parents. Other perception shared include the debilitating damage to properties including university buildings and staff care.

The different arguments shared by the majority of the respondents interviewed shows that the #FMFC has done more collateral damage to the university than good. For instance, the recent #FMFC protest saw the extent of material damages to the universities. In addition, one of the primary perception shared by the majority of the academics is the concern of fear and intimidation, especially during the #FMFC within and outside the university premises. A number of the academic staff interviewed explain the heightened level of intimidation and harassments from protesting students. The question is however, how will the intimidation and harassment of university academic staff address the demand of #FMFC?

On the question of safety, academic staff interviewed recounted how a number of staff were physically assaulted and abused during the protests and going-forward, fear and panic were provoked leading to many academic staff seeking for psychological therapy. Unarguably, the importance of safety should be guaranteed by the risk management service of the university. According to the majority of the academic staff interviewed, these academic staff were over-powered in most of the protests on the UKZN campuses leaving both the security outfits and staff to personally sought for their respective safety. The perception of financial constraints was also argued. For instance, the academic staff cited the inadequate budget allocation to education in the country and argued that abolishing tuition fees will only leave the university financial redundant and incapacitated. Thus, the arguments is that tuition fees are needed to augments the low financial supports from the central governments. One of the respondents critically argued on the perception of the abolishment of tuition fees as the core of the demand of the #FMFC as follows:

I think one fact that we must face in this struggle of #FMFC is that public universities cannot entirely abolish tuition fees for students. This is not a global trend and it should not start with South African universities. Aside that the universities are on the payroll of government in terms of allocation, public universities are also obliged to pursue Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) and tuition fees remain one of this components. The allocation coming in from the government is far reduced in recent times. Thus, the perception of the abolishment of tuition fees remain unrealizable in this era.

Other respondents also shared sentiments on the extent of the damages #FMFC has engendered to the university properties and academic staff. One of the respondents, explained that the measure of these damages are far from being estimated and this would cause the university a whole lots even from the sparse available resources. This view was further expressed below:

I am sure the perception of the #FMFC shared by the majority of the academic staff is one that reflect the dastard act in terms of damages to buildings and other properties on both campuses of UKZN. Without mincing words, this is utterly condemnable and it has left a long lasting perception on the minds of many of us as academics of this institution. I do not think it has been this worse in recent times in the history of students' protests. This is far from what I considered protests but an intention to damage infrastructure.

Another sentiment shared on staff perception of the impact of the #FMFC is the safety concern for academic staff. This position was argued by the large majority of the respondents who have been practically victims of the #FMFC protests. For instance, it was contend that the disruption of lectures and damages to the university properties exacerbated fears and psychological traumas in many academic staff. In other words, this perception signpost the negative components of the #FMFC within the university. In their opinion, while the call for free tuition through #FMFC is not realizable, the mode of conveying these protests call for scrutiny as it comes with many negative outlook including the safety of many academic staff members. One of the staff member reported as follows:

We must not forget to talk about the safety concern of the academic staff during these protests. A number of the academic staff were exposed to security challenges during these protests, especially during the peak of the crisis such as the forceful closure of classrooms and removals of academic staff from the lecture halls and the burning of critical infrastructure in the university. All of these events culminated into serious safety concerns for many academic staff.

On the question of staff perception of the impact of the #FMFC, another perception reflects the concern of financial bankruptcy if the request for free tuition are entertained on the part of the university. In other words, critical activities of the university will be hampered including but not limited to teaching delivery and other services. One of the respondents critically render his perception on the #FMFC, particularly in relation to the demand for free tuition among others as follows:

We need to be objective and pursue realistic goal as much as possible. For me, one of the important perception I have for the demand for #FMFC is that it is unrealistic and impractical since a number of the university projects are executed through the IGR not excluding the tuition fees. Giving ascent to such demand on the part of the university is more like putting the university on a journey of financial constraints as vital projects will suffer severe setbacks. In my opinion, we cannot afford to close down the university because of this request.

6.2 The Effect of the #FMFC on Academic Staff Responsibilities

The academic staff of universities are saddled with a variety of responsibilities including teaching, research and mentoring. These responsibilities forms important component of the university activity that drive educational development in any sense. There are challenges or issues that can present hindrance to the smooth actualization of these responsibilities. The majority of the academic staff members reiterated the effect of the #FMFC on academic responsibilities in the university to include the challenge of decreased educational resources, lower standard of teachings, fear and intimidation of academic personnel, increased workload and uncertainties respectively.

The majority of the respondents argued that there are evidence of decreased educational resources in the university as a result of the #FMFC. These claims are related to students not having enough time to study and complete practical assignments as a result of the continuous protests during the #FMFC. It was further explained that these incidences are not doubt lowering the quality of the university education. Other effect of the #FMFC on academic staff responsibilities also reflect the ascending quality of teachings as many of the academic staff had to resist approaching the classrooms during the protest for fear of assault and abuse. The responsibilities of academic staff have been burden with the increased workload as classes and tests have to be repeatedly postponed as a result of the incessant protests from the #FMFC. The majority of the respondents further argued that these events have altogether created an uncertain moods for academic staff with a negative outlook on their responsibilities. One of the academic staff reported below:

One of the effect of the #FMFC on academic staff responsibilities in my opinion is the consistent decreased educational resources. For instance, during the #FMFC protests, several laboratories, classes and library were shut down indefinitely and this constitute a major hindrance to the effective actualization of the academic staff responsibilities. On no account will these development enhance the responsibilities of the academic staff.

Another opinion shared on the effect of the #FMFC on academic staff responsibilities is the continuous lower standard of teachings. It was unanimously agreed by the majority of the respondents that the #FMFC protests have been positing continuous negative outlook on the quality of teachings offered by the academic staff with the disruption of classes, test and examinations. One of the respondents in particular explained thus:

The most significant effect of the #FMFC on the responsibilities of academic staff as teachers and researchers is evident in the continuous lower standard of teachings. Many academic staff have resorted to avoid class rooms and laboratory during the #FMFC protests and these have culminated into low quality of teachings and research.

The #FMFC protests also comes with its challenge on the responsibilities of academic staff in the area of increased workload for staff with the continuous postponement of classes, tests and examinations arising from #FMFC protest. In other words, it was argued by the large majority of the respondents that these disruptions have galvanized into mammoth workload for academic staff as reiterated by one of the academic staff below:

It is not surprising that the #FMFC has change the arrangement and responsibilities of work as academic staff. Recently, our academic calendar has been halted and things are not the same again. We now have excess of workload to catch up with as a result of these incessant #FMFC protests wherein students are changing classes, test and examinations dates due to the protests. The effect of this on academic staff is that there are faced with workload in order to meet up.

7. Discussions

The focus of this paper has been to understand academic staff perceptions of the #FMFC in a higher institution of learning. The academic staff example offers an interesting contribution to studies on #FMFC in South Africa. For instance, the large number of available studies on the #FMFC narrative have been interrogated from the prism of students' protests leaving sparse attention to the academic staff. The research revealed that the participants felt unsafe when coming to work. Staff feared being hurt during the protest, the protest being associated with excessive violence. Academic staff witnessed the protesters burning of security cars and some of the university facilities. Protesters even entered lecture venues, interrupting lectures. The #FMFC violence climate predicted physical and psychological strain (anxiety and depression) and perceived workplace safety to staff. The results from the study conducted by Hambling et al., (2017) supported that there are negative implications for employees who are exposed to a climate of violence. The #FMFC have caused university employees to feel unsafe, perceiving the protest as violent (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015).

Academic staff raised the concerned that UKZN will be financially constrained if tuition fees remain unchanged. The university will not be able to improve its much-needed academic resources if fees are not being paid. Teaching delivery was affected during the protests, and it has hampered the institutional structure and plans. The future of the university was not settled, and there were concerns of employment security. Staff are afraid of losing their jobs. There were possibilities of retrenchment if the parties do not come to a solid agreement (Hodes, 2017; Jalagat, 2016).

The findings of this research indicated that the #FMFC did affect the image of UKZN. Importantly, one salient gap that the study found was the reality that, although there has been a plethora of studies on the #FMFC, there were insufficient studies to understand staff perceptions on the impact of the #FMFC within a university context. From the findings of this study, the disruption of the academic calendar and programmes had the most serious impact (Mpofu, 2017). Such led to extended work hours and graduation periods. Other factors that had a serious impact on the university system included low morale amongst staff and students, brain drain, attrition amongst professors, and poor staff relationships with student representative bodies. This led to the image of the university being questioned (Joseph, 2017).

The findings of this study revealed a plethora of effects of the #FMFC on UKZN staff responsibilities. For instance, themes uncovered under this finding include, but are not limited to reduced

staff teaching-delivery effectiveness, serial suspension of lectures, reduced productivity of staff through unceasing student protests and the decrease in the teaching potency of many academic staff within the university. The findings support Langa et al., (2017) and de Aberu (2018). In their separate studies, these researchers found that intermittent #FMFC students protests in selected South African universities have not only erupted and disrupted the planned academic programmes of universities, but have equally engendered many disruptions that have characterised low staff performance in recent times.

The findings of the study revealed that the #FMFC decreases the quality of education, owing to lectures being suspended almost every day. The staff concerns were also that the syllabus for the year could not be completed before the time of the examination. The image of the university was of concern. The burning of the Howard College library impacted the quality of education because the books that were burnt were priceless; the university cannot replace them; thus, this will hamper the quality of education (Langa et al., 2017).

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings concluded that #FMFC has negatively impacted the academic staff at UKZN. The study also highlighted several factors as important determinants of the #FMFC and its impact on staff perceptions and organisational performance at UKZN. Overall, by paying attention to the stated recommendations and implementing them, all stakeholders at UKZN can ensure that the #FMFC and its impact on academic staff can be managed correctly. This study has given insight into the perceptions of employees at UKZN regarding the #FMFC and its impact on academic performance. These perceptions ranged from fear and concern to anxiety and de-motivation. Therefore, it is envisaged that the recommendations be implemented to improve academic staff perceptions and organisational performance.

On recommendation, the South Africa political atmosphere is no doubt tense, especially with the consequences for the Black population. Therefore, based on the findings from this study, it is imperative that government inject more funds into the university system through appropriate channels in the form of bursaries, private participation, education tax funds (NRF scholarships), and scholarships, in order to enhance the economic conditions of economically disadvantaged students. This in turn will decrease the incessant demands of the #FMFC. The injection of these funds should be disbursed appropriately and timeously. The study also recommends more enhanced conditions of service for academic staff to make their jobs more attractive. For instance, the management team should put in place security measures guaranteeing the safety and lives of staff during any protests.

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