

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF INCESSANT INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY
MEMBERS OF ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) ON
STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY, LOKOJA**

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ABSTRACT

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is always in the news for prolonged industrial action. This ugly experience has generated a lot of concern among most Nigerians especially stakeholders in the educational sectors. During these periods, there were usually unbridled animosity, frustration and anxiety among some Nigerians especially students, parents, politician, among others. Since the formation of ASUU in 1978, it has been in a long drawn battle with the government to respect the demands of the Union. It is the objective of this paper therefore to trace the genesis of the ASUU struggle; conceptual clarification, the aims of the formation of ASUU and theories in which the paper was anchored were discussed. The paper highlighted the demands of ASUU, x-rays the impact of ASUU strike on Federal University of Lokoja. Disruption of academic programmes, delay in graduation and call up for the National Youth Service Scheme are some of such effects. The paper finally handed down some recommendations such as; the federal government to honour any agreement reached and students to cultivate the habit of studying at home in times of strike.

Keywords: Impact, Industrial Conflict, Trade Disputes, Collective bargaining, Agreement.

Introduction

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) grew out of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT). The NAUT was formed in 1965, covering academic staff in the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Nsuka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Ife. The NAUT orientation was mainly for improvement in the condition of service, the socio-economic and political well-being of the country. (ASUU National Secretariat, 2014). NAUT hardly even took any noteworthy position on national issues. Ideologically, it seemed to be a middle-class fraternity with viewpoints not too divergent from those of the post-colonial state. On the few occasions that it issued public statements, they tended to be conservative and sympathetic to the regime.

To understand why NAUT became unsuitable for the development of the University system in Nigeria, it is useful to understand that the development of the university system was a function of the movement of the socio-political and economic direction of the country. Toyo (1990) puts it succinctly when he places the ASUU struggle on the roots and the bad faith of primitive bureaucracy and crude militarism.

ASUU was formed in 1978, the period of the beginning of the decline in the oil boom, when the country faced the consequences of the failure by its rulers to use oil wealth to generate production and social welfare system. Military dictatorship had eroded deeply the basic freedoms in the society. Academic freedom and university autonomy were casualties of military dictatorship. The funding of education, and so of universities, became poorer. The factors required a changed orientation of the union of academics, from 1980. ASUU orientation became radical; more concerned with broad national issues, and stood firmly against oppressive, undemocratic policies of the country. Assault on academic freedom was subject of resistance by ASUU throughout freedom was the subject of resistance by ASUU throughout the 1980s. Throughout the military period ASUU waged its struggles around:

- a. the survival of the university system with three components, the conditions of service (salary and non-salary, funding and university autonomy/academic freedom, the defence of the right to education.
- b. broad national issues such as antimilitary struggles, the struggle against military rule, the struggle against privatization, against structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the World Bank's attempt to take over universities (Ajayi, 2014).

The military government responded to ASUU's opposition of its polities by arresting, detaining, and out rightly sacking some lecturers especially the leaders of the union. In spite of all these ASUU did not change its position and instead, began to strengthen its relationship with the civil society organizations. At some point ASUU was proscribed and the lecturer came up with University Lecturers Association, even though the government made pronouncements of not recognizing the University Lecturers Association, activities of University Lecturers Association went on unabated underground until ASUU was de-proscribed. Regime after regime in Nigeria, ASUU has had rough times with them over its demands for better condition of services for its members. ASUU struggles have lived up to the Union's conventional requirement that the Union should defend the interests of its members, establish and maintain just and proper conditions of service for its members, the protection and advancement of the socio-economic interest of the nation. It is not the goal of ASUU to please any government in power, it is her historical mission to play the role of creating new values, producing knowledge for freeing the people of Nigeria from the systematic domination to where the people have been subjected since slavery through colonization to the present. (ASUU, 2010)

ASUU struggles arose out of the necessity to build a country in which every citizen shall be free, educated, well-fed, and healthy. We cannot abandon those struggles and yet be worthy of being called intellectuals. The struggles usually call for sacrifice. We have made them and should be ready to continue to make them. Emigration is not a good alternative given our mission. We should not abandon what has been built with the blood and sweat of our people to agents of domination and oppression of African and other peoples.

We must not abandon our people, the oppressed, and the under privileged.
This is where we stand. This is where we ought to stand. (ASUU, 2010).

Conceptual Analysis

Industrial Conflicts

The human society is full of conflicts. Conflicts arise as a result of disagreement between two antagonizing parties. With reference to the industrial society, industrial conflict is the inability of parties to an employment relation (employers and employees represented by their unions) to reach agreement on any issue connected with object of employer – employee interaction (Wokoma, 2011). Industrial conflicts could also be seen as a breakdown of cordial relationship between labour and management. Industrial conflict is thus, the result of an unpalatable, imbalanced and antagonistic relationship and interaction between and among parties involved in industrial relations. The import of this is that industrial conflict is expressed of not-so-good and hostile relationship between and among industrial relations parties.

Many discussions on industrial conflicts refer to strikes. Strikes are the most over form of industrial conflicts. Fajana (2000) therefore defines strikes as a temporary cessation of work efforts by employees in the pursuance of a demand. Strikes have become a significant approach toward expressing workplace grievances. Adeogun (1980) remarked that strike is all about “grievances, actual or imagined, arising from industrial life.

Trade Dispute

Generally, the intention of parties in an employment relationship is to have a continuing relationship. However, labour and industrial relations are vulnerable to changing, sometimes divergent interests, which could engender conflicts. Industrial conflicts arise in the workplace, since the interests of management and labour do not always coincide. These conflicts may or may not lead to industrial actions. Inability of the parties to resolve an emerging conflict may eventually result into a trade dispute, which itself could precipitate an industrial action (Orifowomo and Ashiru, 2015). Section 540 of the National Industrial Court Act (NICA) defines trade dispute to mean any dispute between employer and employees including dispute between their respective organization and federations which is connected with:

- a. the employment or non-employment of any person,
- b. terms of employment and physical conditions of work of any person,
- c. the conclusion or vacation of a collective agreement, and
- d. an alleged dispute

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is a means of regulating relations between management and employees and for settling disputes between them (Khabo, 2008). It is based upon the realization that employers enjoy greater social and economic power than individual workers. The contract of employment is by nature imbalanced due to the fact that its content is largely determined by the employer by virtue of him owning the means of production and this places him in a stronger bargaining position.

Collective bargaining has a great potential for minimizing conflicts, and redressing confrontational attitudes and acrimony inherently associated with the employment relations, thereby promoting industrial peace and ultimately economic growth. On its own, it can serve as a mechanism for labour dispute resolution of labour dispute in collective bargaining agreements. One of the virtues of collective bargaining is that disputes are solved at source, a factor that does not leave the bitterness associated with such adversarial processes of dispute resolution as adjudication.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

A collective bargaining agreement (CBA) is a written legal contract between an employer and a union representing the employees. The CBA is the result of an extensive negotiation process between the parties regarding topics such as wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment (SHRM).

There are three different categories of subjects that are part of a CBA: Mandatory, voluntary or permissive and illegal subjects. Mandatory subjects are those topics required by law and the National Labour Relations Board. Those subjects include items like wages, overtime, bonuses, grievances procedures, safety and work practices, and seniority, as well as

procedures for discharge, layoff, recall, or discipline. Voluntary or permissive subjects maybe negotiated but are not required and include topics such as internal union matters and the make-up of the employer's board directors. Illegal subjects that would violate a law are prohibited, such as closed shops (when an employer will hire only members from a union) or illegal discrimination.

It is important to note that once a CBA is reached, both the employer and the union are required to abide by that agreement. Therefore, an employer should retain legal counsel before participating in the collective bargaining process.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories – Unitary theory and Marxian (Conflict) theory.

Unitary Theory

This theory identifies an organization as comprising of groups of individuals who have and share some goals, and work as members of one team. The unitary view recognizes an organization as one big happy family. Unitarists view the enterprise as a unitary system with one source of authority – management, and one focus of loyalty-labour (Armstrong, 2009). Unitary framework extols the virtue of teamwork, where everyone strives jointly to a common objective, everyone pulls their weight to the best of their ability, and everyone accepts their place and function gladly (Armstrong, 2007). The unitary view sees conflict as a bad thing which should not exist because it served as a constraint towards the achievement of mutual objectives of both management and labour. However, unitarism has been criticized as being essentially autocratic and authoritarian. It also does not recognize the fact that an organization is made up of individuals and groups with divergent and often conflicting internal.

Marxian (Conflict) theory

In view of the inherent weakness of the unitary theory in recognizing that an organization consists of people who often conflicting interests, the Marxists theorized that conflict is an inherent characteristic of the society. This view of Industrial Relations looks at the nature of the capitalist between labour and capital, and sees workplace relations against this background.

The conflict theory is embedded in works and ideas of Karl Marx. This theory explains that conflict is inevitable and stems from inequalities of power and economic wealth inherent in a capitalist economy. In Marxian analysis, conflict is attributed to an enduring power struggle between workers and their employers over the control of various aspects of work (Fashoyin, 2007) identifying the causes of workplace conflict, Fashoyin (2007) further submits that inequality in the distribution of the proceeds of industry, job-security of the worker, and poor management control strategies breed grievances which lead to conflict. Here, conflict is seen as inevitable, and trade unions are a natural response of workers to their exploitation by capitalists, since it is rather difficult and dangerous for workers individually express their grievances to management. Conflict theorists posit that there may be periods of acquiescence in this conflicting relationship. However, the institutions of joint regulations are believed to enhance rather than limit management's position as they presume the continuation of capitalism rather than challenge it (Wokoman & Chiemela, 2011)

This theory (Marxian Conflict) is of much relevance in explaining industrial relations in Nigeria. Observably, industrial relations in Nigeria are largely imbalanced and antagonistic between the parties involved, often in favour of capital. The employer is wielding so much power at the expense and exploitation of the work. Thus, in response to such exploitative tendencies, conflicts result, conflicts over processes of work relations and control. With regards to wages, while the capitalist endeavour to purchase labour at the lowest price possible, the wage worker on the other hand, tries to sell at the highest possible price in order to ensure his existence (Fajana, 2000).

The unitary theory identifies an organization as comprising of individuals which ASUU is. The Marxian (conflict) theory talks of conflict being inevitable in human society because of inequalities of power and economic wealth inherent in a capitalist society; this the Nigerian society represents. The two theories are very relevant to the topic of discourse.

Objectives of ASUU

The objectives of ASUU are contained in the Rule '2' of the constitution of ASUU. Its principal objectives are as follows:

1. To organize all academic staff who are qualified for membership.
2. To regulate the relationship between academic staff and employers and between members.
3. To establish and maintain a high standard of academic performance and professional practice.
4. To establish and maintain a just and proper conditions of service for its members.
5. To advance the education and training of its members.
6. To provide benefits and other assistance to its members.
7. To encourage the participation of its members in the affairs of the University system of a nation.
8. To protect and advance the socio-economic and cultural interests of the nation and
9. To pursue such other objectives that are lawful and are not inconsistent with the spirit and practice of trade unionism (ASUU constitution, 1978 as amended in 1984).

Source: Sanchi, Alhassan, Ekeuna, Asamu and Sabo (2022).

Causes of ASUU Strike

ASUU Strike in Nigerian Universities have become problematic that parents and students are divided in their opinion on who is responsible for these lingering crises. While some view government nonchalant attitude and lack of commitment to the welfare of education sector as the cause, others blame ASUU on their radicalism, confrontational approach and insatiable demand. Apart from the sentiments being expressed by people, not so much effort in the form of research has been extended towards this industrial crisis. Fashoyin (2009) noted that despite their significance, strike in Nigeria has hardly received serious attention in industrial relation research. However, in Nigeria, professionals resorted to strike as a weapon in industrial relation in the 70s. The reason for this according to Anoneba (2015), is the social scientists

showed no interest in professional unionism because until very recently, trade unionism was regarded as a working-class phenomenon and generally thought to be inconsistent with the ethic and status of professional employees. Uzoechkwu, Anierobi and Ezennaka (2021) observe that what caused ASUU strike right from the formation of ASUU in 1978 are still the same issues responsible for the strike of 2022. It shows how the attitude of government towards tertiary education in Nigeria remain myopic, insensitive and inhuman. They pointed out that the previous ASUU strike of 1978 was as a result erosion of university authority, visitation of academic freedom, poor condition of service, poor salary structure, under funding of the universities, lack of infrastructural facilities and delay in the payment of elongated salary structure.

Wahab (2018) also observed that ASUU and government are always in conflict over funding of the Nigerian Universities, university autonomy and improved working conditions among others. Wahab further posited that each time the two parties come to dialogue in order to settle the disagreement; it would always end up in empty, vain and unfulfilled promise by the government. Presently, the government is still bent on interfering on the autonomy of the Universities through the introduction of Integrated Payroll Personnel Information System (IPPIIS) (2017) observed that most of our citizens are rushing to Ghana, most Universities there are public universities.

In summary, the crux of the matter according to Sanchi et al (2022) centres on ASUU trying to protect its interest, as well as upgrade Nigerian Universities in all ramifications for competitive advantage.

Impact of ASUU strike on Federal University, Lokoja

Federal University was established along with other eight new Federal Universities on the 16th February, 2011 following a pronouncement by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The University is sited in Lokoja, the capital city of Kogi State of Nigeria, in the North Central Political Zone.

As the current ASUU strike of 2022 is affecting other Universities, Federal University, Lokoja is not left out of such impact. The effects of the long-term strike action on Nigerian students and the education sector cannot be overemphasized (Ajayi, 2014) Disruptions in academic programmes serves as non-motivational factor to the students. It is not surprising therefore that during strike actions, most students are seen involved in diverse activities such as sexual immorality, cyber scam, pool belting, unnecessary gossips, watching of films etc. In long term they soon forget about academics and are no longer prepared for class activities which negatively affect their learning capabilities. Chand (2016) concluded that an effective learning or an enhanced academic performance is achieved of the course outline timely and before examination. This is rarely achieved with strike action in place.

Due to the time wasted, students get rushed through the curriculum without attention being paid to whether concepts taught are understood or not. This leads to a drop in academic performance and low motivation towards excellence. Presently students of Federal University, Lokoja experience delays in their graduation time and time for the National Youth Service assignment. Some spent 7 years studying a course which ordinarily should have been 4 years. Cybercrime, drug addiction, gambling, cultism and other undesirable acts have been on the rise since students have been at home. Students have been arrested at different times of different crimes; this was as a result idleness of the students (Wahab, 2018).

Disruption of academic activities has been seen as causes of depression, psychological and emotional trauma, fear of not knowing what next, and other psychological problems in students. This may lead to low self-esteem when they see their counterpart in private universities graduating and moving on with their lives while they are in one class for two or three years. A lot of students have lost belief in education and the education sector as a result of the long-term strike action. Those of them, who have engaged in money-making ventures, are no longer keen in returning back to classroom (Sanchi et al, 2022). This shows that extent the young generation has lost belief in the educational system.

Some parents who have provided the basic amenities for their children on campus will go through the stress of re-providing, as most students have consumed their resources, while the perishable ones will have been lost as a result of the long strike. The situation we are witnessing in Nigerian Universities has resulted in the churning out of half -baked graduates into the labour market. These half-baked produced cannot live up to expectation in their various chosen professions. This is as a result of poor learning necessitated by poor services from aggrieved lecturers.

Financial loss to the universities is another angle to it. When the universities are shot down due to strike the universities still run and pay for services such as power and water supply, as well as running and maintenance of vehicles. On estimate of the internal and external losses to the Nigerian Universities system for one month of total strike involving all the unions is in the neighbourhood of billions of naira (Ajayi, 2015). Finally, top-rated universities desirous of staff and students exchange will prefer to partner with universities that maintain stable academic calendar in other parts of Africa.

Conclusion

ASUU strikes have placed limitations on student's aspiration, to complete their course of study in good time apart from the fact that the strikes elongate the study duration of university students. The performance of students in academics activities are hampered, so much so that good and brilliant students end up graduating with poor grades. Government education policies and the associated inactions and the strike embarked upon by members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities have contributed to the poor academic performance of the University students in Nigeria.

The avoidable conflict between the government and ASUU must not be allowed to jeopardize the academic and future of Nigerian students. Education in Nigeria must be given its pride of place; the government must strive hard to meet United Nation's Minimum standard. Nigerians Universities cannot be locked up permanently and think ASUU and government will move about comfortably.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby put forward to address incessant ASUU strikes in Nigerian public universities.

- i. Government has to learn to keep to bargains and meet up with their obligations; they should not wait to be reminded. ASUU has been drawing their attention to outstanding in terms of allowances.
- ii. Instead of opening more universities, government should invest more in already existing universities and ensure they have enabling environment for academic pursuit.
- iii. Implementation of the reached agreement between ASUU and Federal Government in 2009 among other recommendations above all, indeed, go a long way in solving the persistent impasse that often result in ASUU strikes in Nigeria.
- iv. The Federal and State governments should work in partnership with ASUU aggressively and assiduously at all levels in making sure that the lingering crises in universities, violation of rights of the academics are addressed.
- v. If the Federal government cannot implement UNESCO recommended 26% of any country's annual budget, it should be close to it to avoid unnecessary bickering on non-provision of infrastructural facilities in our ivory towers.
- vi. There should be reduction of bureaucracies to enhance effective personal communication between ASUU officials and government bodies.
- vii. Students should cultivate the habit of study at home during strikes, this will help to improve their performance when strike is suspended or call off.

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