

## Impact of Frequent ASUU Strikes on University Education in Nigeria. A review

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**Abstract:** This paper X-rayed the impact of ASUU strike on University education in Nigeria. The paper further explored the objectives of ASUU as a body, the causes of incessant ASUU strikes in Nigerian Universities and the positive and negatives impacts of ASUU strikes on University Education. In the same vein, the paper unveiled the possible ways of managing ASUU strikes in Nigerian Universities. The study found out that, ASUU strike has negative effect on the quality of university graduates that the country produces. In view of this, it was recommended among others that, government should develop actions that will help to check incessant industrial action in Nigerian universities and the educational sector as a whole.

**Keywords:** Impact, Frequent ASUU Strikes, University Education, Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was formed in 1978. It is an offspring of Nigerian Association of University Teachers formed in 1965. The union aim at assisting: - the stake holders in achieving its high profile in education and in development and promoting sustainable management of education by providing high-quality services in Education. In addition the union also

supports the struggle for the improvement of the social, economic professional situation of the members, safeguard their interests and work for their success. In Nigeria as in other countries, trade unions do use various strategies to achieve their goals. Ameh (2017), reported that, trade union such as ASUU, usually embark on various actions over agitations for improvement of their welfar

teaching and research facilities and university autonomy. Since the formation of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in 1978, the union is generally considered strike as the last option to influence government decision. The action involves one of the followings: - (i) suspension of work; (ii) refusal to work; (iii) continue to work under certain conditions; or (iv) slowdown of work. The first strike action reported by Chand (2016), was organized in 1988 during General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida for fair wages and university autonomy. The situation worsened during late General Sani Abacha when the union embarked on strike in 1994 and 1996 protesting against the dismissal of their members. During President Olusegun Obasanjo, the struggle for improvement of salary, teaching and research facilities, university autonomy and reinstatement of forty-nine lecturers from university of Ilorin led to another strike in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The strike was suspended when late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua came to power. With the coming of an academician as the president of the country (Dr. Goodluck Jonathan), it was hoped that the regime will bring lasting solution to ASUU problem. Unfortunately, failure of the Federal Government to implement the 2009 agreement led to another strike action which disrupted the activities of universities for another six months. The persistent strikes have definitely affected the stability of university calendar in Nigeria. Chijioke (2013), reported in his research that the perennial disputes between ASUU and the government over the last fourteen years had made universities to lose three years of academic study. Despite the importance of stability on school calendar on education, the incessant ASUU strikes action in the country has become worrisome and destabilized the programme of educational sector. It is on record that, from 1988 to date, the national

body of the union had embarked on series of strike actions. Amadi and Precious (2015) reported that ASUU organised strike in 1988, 1992, 1994 and 1996. Enomah (2010) reported that in the present dispensation ASUU had organised strikes in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011-2012, 2013,2019,2020 and 2022. Beside these, local chapters also do organize their branch strike actions from time to time. The persistent ASUU strikes in Nigeria have disrupting school academic, left academic activities of universities disjointed, and distract the normal learning process. According to Adamu and Ngwo (2014a), disruption in academic program resulting from strike led to closure of universities for a period of time thereby affecting the academic activity of universities. Ajayi (2014), and Albar (2016), maintained that instability in school calendar through strike elongate study period and hamper their academic activities. Considering the impact of strike actions on school calendar and academic activities, the researchers examined the impact of ASUU strike on University Education.

ASUU strikes in Nigerian universities have become so common that parents and students are divided in their opinion on who is responsible for these lingering crises. When some view government nonchalant attitude and lack of commitment to the welfare of the education sector as the cause, others blame ASUU on their radicalism, confrontational approach and insatiable demand. Two kinds of strikes can be noticed in Nigerian universities – the internal and national strikes. Internal strike takes place within the university. Such strike is triggered by factors inherent in each university. National strike involves many universities owned by the state and federal governments. Strike can also be total if academic staff withdraw their services completely from their places of work. It is partial when lecturers report at their places of

work but refuse to work. It can also be definite or indefinite. But today, the key outstanding issues leading to ASUU strike include:

- Rejection of Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) as a payment platform of lecturers' salaries. An alternative developed by ASUU itself; University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) has been proposed as their payment platform and it is already undergoing integrity tests.
- Universities' funding.
- Payment of outstanding earned allowances; of which the amount is still under negotiation. The government proposed to pay N40 billion.
- Revitalization of education sector; the amount for this is also under negotiation. N30 billion was proposed by the government.
- Payment of withheld salaries to lecturers. Prof. Biodun asserted that "the first step to resolving the impasse is for the government to pay withheld salaries of our members. It is between four and eight months. You cannot tell a person whose salaries have been seized unjustifiably to go back to work. Moreover, these salaries must be paid through the normal channel."
- Government fulfilling their part of the agreement made in 2013.
- Constitution of Visitation panels to Federal universities.

### The 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 relation 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 in consisted with the spirit and practice of trade unionism (ASUU constitution, 1978 as amended in 1984).

### The Causes of ASUU Strikes in Nigeria

ASUU strikes in Nigerian universities have become so problematic that parents and students are divided in their opinion on who is responsible for these lingering crises. When some view government nonchalant attitude and lack of commitment to the welfare of the 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 seventies. The reason for this, according to Anonaba (2015), is that 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 ethics and status of professional employees.

Regarding the causes, Adavbiele (2015), x-ray the causes of strike actions as; unfair treatment to the employees/victimization, violation of legislation and poor application of the provision of collective bargaining. Adamu and Ngwo (2014b), observes that unions within the system have often based their demands on adequate funding of the system, university autonomy and academic freedom, as well as salary and conditions of service. It also notes that high handedness, arbitrariness and corruption, on the part of university administration, are some of the causes of agitation in the system. Again, Prof. Biodun Ogunyemi, the immediate past president of ASUU, speaking on some of the agreement held with the government, noted that government had reneged on a 2013 agreement to revitalize universities with 1.3trillion over a period of six years. The first year, the government was to release N200billion, which it did, but it took a long time for us to access it. But since that release in 2013, no single kobo has been released thereafter. For 2014, N220billion was not released. Again 2015 and 2016, nothing was released up to the third quarter of 2017. In all, we can estimate the outstanding amount to be about N825billion for revitalization of our universities and in the last two years, what has been allocated to education was between six and seven percent. Even in countries where they had wars like Rwanda and Sudan, they are still allocating well above 20percent to education. Our citizens are rushing to Ghana, most universities there are public universities (Ameh, 2017) In summary, the crux of the matter centres on ASUU trying to protect its interest, as well as upgrade Nigerian Universities in all ramifications for competitive advantage.

### The Impact of ASUU strikes on University Education

The effects of the long term strike action on Nigerian students and the education sector at large cannot be overemphasized (Ajayi 2014).

- Right now, all public universities academic calendar has been disrupted and this leads to an inability to cover course outlines before exams are written. As a result of this, Nigerian graduates who travel abroad to further their studies sometimes have issues with catching up with their foreign counterparts on topics that they were not properly taught during their undergraduate years.
- Due to the time wasted, students get rushed through the curriculum without attention being paid to whether the concepts taught are understood or not. This leads to a drop in academic performance and low motivation towards excellence.
- Presently in Nigeria, students in public universities who join in strike actions experience delays in their graduation time. Some spend seven years studying a course which is supposed to take four years. A famous proverb says ‘the idle hand is the devil’s workshop’. As a result of the strike action, many university students have resorted to engaging in nefarious activities. Since they have a lot of free time on their hands with nothing to do to while away the time, unproductive activities have caught their eye.
- Cybercrime, drug addiction, gambling, cultism, and other immoral acts have been on the rise since students have been at home. These activities draw students away from academics since they leave no time for them to read and then affect their performances

thereby leading to yielding of half-baked graduates from the educational sector.

➤ Disruption of academic activities has been seen to cause depression, psychological and emotional trauma, fear of not knowing what next, and other psychological problems in students. This may lead to low self-esteem sometimes when they see their counterparts in private universities graduating and moving on with their lives while they are stuck in one class for over two years. This may also lead to depression and causes some students to start abusing drugs to be able to forget their woes about how the educational system has failed those who cannot afford to attend private universities.

➤ A lot of students have lost belief in education and the education sector as a result of the long-term strike action. Words like “*who school help?*” which undermines the usefulness of education have taken over social media as many students have been engaging in money-making activities, some legal while others are illegal. This has made some of them consider dropping out of school and face their money-making ventures. This shows the extent to which the young generation has lost belief in the educational system

According to Amadi and Precious (2015) the effects of ASUU strikes can also be categorized into two fundamental parts- Positive effect and Negative effect.

### Under the positive impact

It includes the following:

1. The funds released for infrastructure will be used to meet the immediate needs of our schools. Some universities will use the funds to construct more hostels; some Universities will use it to equip libraries, provide internet connectivity, build laboratories and furnish them, amongst others. These are projects that

will aid learning and ultimately benefit students.

2. Those that will later join the academia and become professors will also benefit of retiring at 70years.

3. Those that will join the academia in time to come stand a chance to enjoy the special allowances that the current struggle will benefit.

### Under the Negative Impact

Disruptions in academic programs serve 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 betting, unnecessary gossips, watching of films and reading comic materials for entertainment purposes rather than reading their books. In the long run, they soon forgot 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 by successful covering of the course outline timely and before the examination. This is rarely achieved with strike action in place.

### Other effects of ASUU strikes

#### Loss of interest in continuing Program:

As a result of this strike, most students have secured jobs or other means of generating money and does not wish the strike to be called off soon, some have even planned not returning to classroom as the salary they now receive is large and they are not sure of getting such jobs after school.

### **Lack of Interest in Nigeria Education System**

Most parents and students have lost interest in the educational system in Nigeria, as those who can afford education outside the country have started making moves towards it. Some soon to be parents have vowed that their children will not school in this system.

### **Hardship on both Parents and Student:**

Some parents who has provided the basic amenities for their kids on campus will go through the stress of re-providing, as most student have consumed their resources, while some other perishables will perish as a result of the extension. Failure to re-provide on the part of the parents will result in the kids suffering during the remaining period of the semester should the strike be called off.

### **Poor Academic Performance:**

It has been proven that students perform less in examinations after returning from a strike period. Most student do not read during strike periods, while others tend to forget key points from lectures as a result of the long wait between lectures and examinations.

### **Putting the Rich Kids ahead of the Poor Kids:**

The rich who can afford private varsities sends their kids there, where their academic calendar is unaffected, the poor who cannot afford it tends to spend more

years on campus as a result of strike, this make the rich kids graduate before the poor kids and as a result of this be ahead in some aspects of life (Chijioke 2013).

### **Increase in Immorality and Crime:**

The strike has caused many to be ideal, like the popular saying: "an ideal man is the devil's workshop. "Pregnancy rate as well as abortion rate among students have increased significantly. Many students still around campus vicinity are seen swotting with the opposite sex as this period of no academic activities make it possible for them to bond better.

### **Ways of Managing ASUU Strikes in Nigerian Universities**

#### **The problem:**

ASUU is complaining that they are supposed to be paid allowances for marking, teaching and supervising more than acceptable number of courses and projects. They have been drawing government's attention to outstanding allowances. Sometimes government signs agreements to get ASUU back to work; they are signed with the intention to break them as they are reached under duress.

#### **Government's part:**

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. Again, instead of opening more universities,

government should invest more in already existing universities and ensure they have enabling environment for academic pursuit. This includes ensuring that there are enough lectures for students. Government is just interested in admitting students into the university and not asking themselves how many students a lecturer should handle. They should invest more in polytechnics and other specialized institutions; many more students deserve to go to vocational training institutes so that less pressure is placed on the university system.

### Checks and balances:

The Federal Government must ensure that lecturers are appropriately monitored, ensure they get to work on time and have enough to do, not just saying they are overworked and they are not getting their allowances. There must be a system in place to assess what they are actually doing and then we will be to know what constitutes excess work. If we cannot define what they are paid to do, how do we define when they are overworked?

### Division of labour:

Agbakwuru (2017) posits that we should revisit the issue of post-graduate universities; some universities should just face post-graduate studies and do more of research and training rather than lecturing undergraduates. In many modern universities, when students are very few in a department, you close down the department. When research and training are not going on in the university system, they close down any department that cannot attract funding for research to face mainly undergraduate

studies. But what we have now is like they say water, water, everywhere but not a drop to drink. Now it is universities everywhere and no one is coming out with good degrees".

### ASUU's part:

The lecturers should have a peer review mechanism in which the university system itself is able to assess lecturers and at the end of every semester, find out how many of these lecturers are really lecturing and what their workload is because some lecturers are overworked while some are just there doing nothing. "Students complain that tutorials no longer hold. There used to be lectures and tutorials. You go for lectures and still have small group tutorials where graduate assistants and other lecturers go through the main lectures with you in different ways. In today's lecture halls, you have thousands of students gathered for one lecture and they hardly hear the lecturer. Universities should also ensure that something like sexual harassment is curbed maximally". Instead of always going on strike; "ASUU should use internal mechanisms to ensure that government is reminded of these agreements and when the agreement is flouted, they should take pages in the newspapers and draw and the general public to how government is flouting the agreements. They could then appeal to the National Assembly's Education committees, appeal to the president and after that, they could give an ultimatum and do warning strikes like two days without lectures. It could also include refusing to hold convocation." According to Albar (2016), strike is normal part of human existence. It is also a normal part of any healthy relationship; for when strike arise, parties are given opportunity to discover faults and shortcomings from the other and when strikes

are resolved, it makes for a better working relationship between both parties. However, it is our opinion that there could be more workable means of resolving this disagreement between the government and the Association of Staff Union of Universities.

In order to curb the negative effects of strike actions and lessen the harm done to youths, the government should work on considering ASUU's request and meeting up with their own part of the agreement. They should ensure institutes of higher learning in Nigeria are revitalized as ASUU demands and invest more in these universities so the academic environment can be conducive for learning and thoroughbred graduates will be produced. If laboratories and libraries are also up to standard, more research works with potentials of international recognition can be done. Lecturers should be paid their allowances and withheld salaries so they can be motivated to impart knowledge without harassing students for payment in any form. ASUU should also work on proper monitoring and assessment of lecturers to ensure they do their jobs, take lectures, and behave properly towards students.

## CONCLUSION

This study is a review of the impact of ASUU strike on Nigerian universities education. It focuses on the causes, effects and possible management strategies to these strikes. ASUU strike action destabilized calendar of universities education in Nigeria. The disruption affects the followings: curriculum implementation, quality of lesson delivery, period of graduation, hampered students' performance and quality of education in the country. The National Policy on Education specified standard and goals of higher

education in Nigeria as enunciated will not be easily achieved. As a result, graduates will not be adequately prepared to face the challenges of labour market and this would increase the rate of graduate youth unemployment in the country. In addition, the pass glory and enviable standard of Nigeria universities locally and globally would be lost.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are hereby put forward on ways to address/manage incessant ASUU strikes in Nigerian public universities

- Implementation of the reached agreement between ASUU and federal government in 2009 among other recommendations above will, indeed, go a long way in solving the persisting impasse that often result in ASUU strikes in Nigeria.
- The federal and state government should work in partnership with the ASUU aggressively and assiduously at all levels in making sure that the lingering crises in universities, violation of the rights of the academics etc are addressed
- The federal government should also create a strong forum where the three actors (ASUU, government and management) interact in getting their problems solved instead of expressing it through strike action.
- The federal government should increase allocations given to Nigerian universities or to education sector by 26% or more.
- The federal government should ensure that University lecturers are closely monitored, at least to ensure that they get to work on due time and perform their functions, to avoid saying they are overworked and not getting their allowances.
- The federal government should always

keep to their promises and bargains. The federal government should work aggressively and assiduously towards ensuring that Domestic and External factors are taken care of.

➤ Nigerian universities need to be re-orientated in consonance with acceptable democratic and international standards at least to eliminate some of their internal challenges like corruption and so on

➤ Appointment of people into governing councils must be based on merit and not on political or ethnic affiliation.

➤ Government should develop actions such as organizing meetings and interaction; this will help to check incessant industrial action in educational sector in Nigeria.

➤ There should be reduction of bureaucracies to enhance effective personal communication between ASUU officials and government bodies.

➤ ASUU officials also should be calm in any of their decisions that will lead to strike actions which will hamper the academic activities of schools.

➤ Students should cultivate the habit of studying at home during strike, this will help to improve their performance when strike is called off.

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