

## Impact of Industrial Unions Strike on the Performance of Public Universities in Nigeria

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**Dominic Shimawua**

*Department of Public Administration,  
Faculty of Management Science, Veritas University, Abuja*

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### **Abstract**

The Nigerian University system, which is designed and packaged to be a fulcrum for national development has witnessed so much industrial unrest. Strikes of various and reasons have become a normal phenomenon in growing inconsiderate policy making relationship between the government and academia. Though it is stipulated in the constitution that strikes can be used as avenues to express public opinion which can bring positive changes, and the frequency of industrial crisis/disputes has affects the standard and products of public Universities in Nigeria despite highly improved inputs and this situation is mirrored effectively in the Nigerian economy. This paper reviews the impact of industrial unions strikes on the performance of public universities in Nigeria. The study revealed that the problem of industrial relations in the Nigerian University system were found to be lack of education of some labour leaders, the rigid structure of relationships, lack of flow of communication, management and government meddling with union affairs, frequent trade disputes, under funding and inadequate teaching facilities. Political factors were also discovered as some of the causes of industrial disputes within the university system. These affect student academic performance and generally loss of productivity in economic sector of Nigeria. The study recommended that both union leaders and management representatives should from time to time embark on training to understand the workings of industrial relations.

**Keywords:** *Impact, Industrial Unions, Strike, Performance*

*Corresponding Author:* Dominic Shimawua

### **Background to the Study**

University worldwide is regarded as the citadel of Knowledge; the fountain of intellectualism; the most appropriate ground for the intellectual incubation of leaders of tomorrow. According to Ike (1999), a university fulfills one major function: it is a knowledge and value provider. It stands or fails in its ability or inability to deliver on this criterion. According to Magna Charta Universitatum, "the university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and is an enterprise that serves multi-disciplinary purposes. This, according to Nwankwo (2000) explains why merit has been, the watchword in the university system where a student must first be certified worthy in character and learning before being admitted into the Honours Degree Flail. However, it is sad not note that the objectives of university has been not fully actualized because hindered of incessant industrial unions strike. Industrial unrests or strikes can arise where employees and employers have failed to satisfactorily agree on their concerns; industrial actions have often been called by representative trade unions. Industrial actions, therefore, represent the climax of unresolved conflicts between employers and employees.

In Nigeria, Yusuf (2017) posit that numerous industrial actions had been embarked on by the union to compel the government to meet the needs of public universities lecturers and schools especially in the areas of wages, allowances and infrastructural facilities in tertiary institutions. During such industrial actions, schools were to shut down for months; academic activities have paralyzed, and students and parents were frustrated. It should, however, be stressed that some of the numerous actions of the ASUU were intended to improve the welfare of the public university, lecturers, students and society at large. For instance, the union has actively involved in the struggles against the military regime during the 1980s.

Yusuf further observed that in 1988, the union organized the national strike to seek the increase in wages and University autonomy. As a result of that industrial action, the union has banned on 7th August 1988, and all its properties have seized. It is on record that several industrial actions had been embarked on after the ban lifted in 1990. The last one took place in 2013, and it lasted for almost six months. These strike actions always lead to disruption of academic programs which may expose students to disjointed learning and it may encourage poor study habit among students.

Empirical study by Odubela, (2012) revealed that an effective learning or an enhanced academic performance is achieved by the successful covering of the course outline before the examination. Maliki and Ekpekin-Ekanem (2011) opined that quality and quantity of students' learning determined by individual study habit. During strike actions, some students may engage themselves in unproductive activities such as sexual immorality, cyber scam, pool betting, playing video games, gossips, watching films and reading comic materials for entertainment purposes rather than reading the school notes. These may affect their academic performance. According to Arukaino (2013), the idling youths at home could cause security problems. Isangedighi (2011) opined that the way a stimulus excites or impacts on an individual would trigger his/her responses. These are an indication that students may lose the skill for preparedness and readiness to learn at the time of the strike. Hence their educational attainment becomes adversely affected.

Odubela (2012) also observed that disruption in academic program occasioned by strike action breeds disappointment, frustration, emotional and psychological trauma, unpreparedness on the part of the students and lack of motivation, which sum up to a non-conducive environment for active learning in Nigerian Universities, a situation that dampens human development. Statistics from the National Universities Commission (2002) revealed that from 1992 up to the present, ASUU had embarked on strikes over 23 times to drive home its demands. From 1999 to 2016, a total of 41 months strikes were occurred in public university in Nigeria (1999 5months, 2001 3months, 2002 2months, 2003 6 months, 2005 1 week, 2007, 3months, 2008 1week, 2009 4 months, 2010 5 months, 2013 2 months, 2weeks, 2014 6 months and 2016 3days (Yusuf, 2017).It is on this background that the study interrogated the impact of industrial unions strike on the performance of public universities in Nigeria.

### **Industrial Strike**

A strike is a temporary work stoppage carried out by one or more group of workers with a view to enforcing or resisting demands or expressing grievances, or supporting other worker in their demands or grievances. Momodu, Gambo and Momodu (2014) described strike as the cessation of work by a body of employees or a labour union representing the interests of the employees in an organization, due to a stalemate in collective bargaining between this group of employees and their management or employer. The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 described strike as suspension or cessation of work by a group of persons employed in any industry, acting in combination or a concerted refusal or a refusal under a common understanding of any number of persons who are or have been so employed to continue to work or accept employment. According to Eni (2000), strike indicates a breakdown of cordial relationship between labour and management and is usually the one aspect of industrial relations that invites the most negative commentary. Fajana (2000) defines strike as a temporary cessation of work efforts by employees in the pursuance of a grievance or 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.”

### **Performance**

Performance is an accomplishment of a given task measured against preset known standards of accuracy, completeness, cost, and speed. In a contract, performance is deemed to be the fulfillment of an obligation, in a manner that releases the performer from all liabilities under the contract. Performance is viewed as the implementation of an action or one's ability. Good performance is also related with achieving the quality, quantity, cooperation, dependability and creativity. Employee performance is considered as the measures of the quality of human capital. According to Churchill, Ford and Walker, (1987), the determinants of performance are personal, organizational, environmental, motivation, skill level, aptitudes and role perceptions). What most administrative officers in government agencies including state government are likely to face is the crucial question of what factors influence employee performance in the public service. Job performance becomes the most important focus of administrators and academicians because the performance level will deteriorate if the level of skill of employee drops (Osawe, 2015).

Performance is an action that involves a lot of efforts aimed at achieving a purpose. Performance is measured on a given set of standard to determine how well or badly a duty or an activity is carried out. Therefore, performance could be good or poor. Performance of Nigerian public service has been a major concern to policy makers and researchers as well. This is because despite all measures put in place to arrest the performance failure, the service, it seems, has defied all approaches towards tackling the problem of inefficiency and capacity collapse (Arowolo, 2012). He identified environment as one of the factors responsible for the above situation.

In analyzing the above factors, it should be stressed that the environment under which an employee operates should be considered as it determines the smooth management of the Human resources in an organization. Human resources is believed to be the “backbone” of the public services with imperative role of ensuring that government policies and programs are implemented effectively and efficiently, hence the environment of the public universities should be able to produce quality (skill) employees, work processes and development, a corrupt free environment and leadership devoid of industrial unions strike.

### **Marxian Conflict Theory**

This study anchored on the Marxian conflict theory. Marxists theorized that conflict is an inherent characteristic of the society. This view of industrial relations looks at the nature of the capitalist society, where there is a fundamental division of interest between labour and capital, and sees workplace relations against this background. The conflict theory is embedded in the 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 or society. In Marxian analysis, conflict is attributable 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-insecurity 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 to 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 (Wokoma, 2010).

This theory is relevant to the study because, industrial relations in Nigeria is 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 worker. Thus in response to such exploitative tendencies, conflicts result, conflicts over processes of work relations and control. With regards to wages, while the capitalist endeavours to purchase labour at the lowest price possible, the wage worker on the other hand, tries to sell his only asset at the highest possible price in order to ensure his existence (Fajana, 2000).

### **Overview Industrial Unions Strike in or among the Public Universities in Nigeria**

The history of strike on the public universities in Nigeria dates back to 20th May, 1980, when trade disputes was declared with the Governing Councils of Universities in Nigeria, which demanded for improved funding of the universities, academic freedom, autonomy, as well as the setting up of a special body, to review the conditions of service of the universities' staff. According to Anonaba (2015) in 1992, members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) declared an industrial dispute, over gross underfunding of universities in Nigeria, poor conditions of service of the academic staff, university autonomy, as well as the need for academic freedom. The strike, which was nationwide, lasted for nine months. At the end, ASUU was proscribed while a separate Salary Scale tagged 'University Academic Staff Salary (UASS) was approved by government. This triggered another strike by the Senior Staff Association of Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes and Allied Institutions (SSATHRIAI) and Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) members, which sought parity in salary with the Academic Staff Union (ASUU).

In February, 1993, the University Academic Salary Scale (UASS), earlier approved for ASUU members, was cancelled while an Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS) was approved in its replacement. Consequently, The 1993/94 academic session was scrapped in most universities. On 3rd May, 1993, members of ASUU declared another strike, which lasted for five months and challenged the cancellation of the University Academic Salary Scale (UASS). In 1994, ASUU declared another politically motivated strike, which demanded the actualization of June 12, 1993, Presidential Election, won by Chief M.K.O Abiola, as well as proper funding of education. The report of the Monitoring Committee on federal tertiary institutions in Nigeria, in March, 2002, cited in (Obe 2003) indicates that between 1992 and 1999, there were seven strike actions including industrial strikes, trade dispute, internal strikes, and nationwide strikes.

On 22nd June, 2009, the National Executives of ASUU declared a total and indefinite strike, to compel Federal Government to sign the agreement reached with ASUU on the re-negotiation of the June, 2001 FGN-ASUU Agreement. In October, 2010, all the Universities in the Southeast zone of Nigeria embarked on an indefinite strike, where they demanded for the implementation of the agreements signed with ASUU, particularly on salary and allowances. A report in the nation's newspapers also indicated that all the tertiary institutions in Kwara State (one of the 36 States in Nigeria) embarked on a strike, demanding for one hundred percent implementation of the Consolidated Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Salary Structure (CONPCASS) and the Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure (CONTEDISS), effective from January, 2009. Of recent, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) declared a strike over the non-implementation of the agreements reached with Federal Government since year 2000. The strike lasted for almost six months and was suspended during the last week of December, 2013. These are few cases of strikes that occurred in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Ige, 2014).

### **Causes of Industrial Unions Strike in Public Universities in Nigeria**

Akpala (1992) identified the causes of industrial disputes as economic, moral and political, and those dependent on the job. On economic causes, he related to improper adjustment of

wages to cost of living, the system of reward of labour in cash, kind or both and working conditions, including working hours. In view of the above, Ajewole (2014) stated that causes of industrial dispute in Nigerian tertiary institution with the staff unions factors related to poor infrastructures, poor salaries, and failure on the part of the federal government and management to implement the agreement between it and union members, incessant increment of fuel by the Federal Government, agitation for the reinstatement of ASUU sacked members, among others. Ames, Harriet, Merryll and Yosuf (2011) attributes industrial unions strike to poor salaries, deterioration of academic facilities and poor working conditions.

On moral and political causes, these from his view point relate to employer's failure to provide adequate measures for the welfare of workers on and off the job. The political side relates to matters about union solidarity, trade union jurisdiction, demarcation of functions recruitment of about and the recognition of worker's organization and their leaders by the employer. Fashoyin (1992) observed that when a trade union called out its members on strike, it is the belief that the strike will exert pressure on the employer to take a desired action such as conceding to a demand for improvement on term of employment or ameliorating an unsatisfactory workers condition. Appleby (1981) asserted that the ratio of profit to wages is usually a source of industrial unions strike between worker and managers.

Ude (2000) in his opening address before the national executive of academic staff union blamed industrial conflict in university on inadequate system of information flow from university management which he argued can lead to rapid circulation of rumors and unnecessary alarm within the university.

Moore (1970) regretted that politicians often see labour potential contribution as mere mobilization of human energies but went ahead and described the workers roles as motor of development. According to him, in many cases, such terminology goes beyond slogans and elaborate, impracticable theories of mass organization or human investment schemes while in practice, nothing concrete is done to operational these ideas. He opined that hidden goal, seen by many as a trap, is that such participation in setting priorities automatically eliminates any opposition to what becomes a joint labor government venture. The above views reflect causes of industrial disharmony in the university system. In most cause, academic staff unions and other affiliated union are sidelined on policies affecting them, prompting unfavorable industrial relations.

### **The Impact of Industrial Unions Strike on Performance of the Public Universities in Nigeria**

The impact of strikes on public universities in Nigeria is diverse. Ige (2014) observed that incessant strikes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have had negative effects with government, parents, and educational institutions' administrators having their share of the effects. Aanyawu (2014) posits that incessant strikes have adverse effect on the economy. According to Aanyawu, these effects include, the suspension of academic activities, and disruptions of academic calendar, conflicts between the government and trade unions, government and academics, corruption, laziness of students, increase in crimes in the society, degrading the academic profile of Nigeria, loss of jobs, inactive economic activities and delay in registration of graduate students with NYSC, just to mention few.

This finding is similar to the observation made by Emenyonu (2004) as universities and tertiary institutions for almost six out of the nine months of the academic years were shut and yet everybody pretended that the remaining three months are enough to complete the year's work. Further result showed that there is irregularity of academic programmes. It was also shown by the result that there are examination malpractices on increase, and cultism among students. This is because students are not properly taught and so they employ various fowl means even in collaboration with their teachers to ensure they pass the examinations.

A study conducted by Anonaba (2015) on strikes in Nigeria higher education. The findings of the study revealed that strikes impacted on the physical state of the Nigerian public universities. According to Anonaba, university structures and equipment are left without use. Vandals use this time to vandalize university property worth millions and the university is not maintained as workers take part in strike actions. Structures, facilities and environment dilapidate when strike suspends daily maintenance. The image of the university continues to wane before members of the society. Parents become fed up with their ward's inability to complete their education.

Humanly, the impact of strike on the University is great. Anonaba (2015) observed that strike prevents human resources that work at the university from working. It prevents them from developing in any of the areas of their duty. The human brains that are trained at the university are set loose of every level of culturization. The impact of such phenomenon is that the society fails to benefit from the trainers, the human resources and brains which are the students. The finding is in line with the findings of Ogette, Eke and Ori (2017) that 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.

Economically, the University dwindles as economic activities become inactivated, yet there are even more expenses but no income. University workers would be paid, electricity, water and security would be paid for, more travels for university officials as they engage in travels for endless negotiations to achieve the aim of going for strike. Strike imposes cost on the employees, the employers and the entire economy. The employees may suffer loss when they are not paid during the strike period. According to Fashoyin (1992) employers cost may be indicated by lost output, lost customers and lost management confidence.

In summary, the economy effects of industrial unions strike is not only on the universities but on the country entirely. The loss of productivity as a result of industrial unions strike affects the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This, according to Fashoyin (1992) constitutes the most significant quantitative cost to society. The instability of the academic calendar in public universities in Nigeria due incessant unions strike has led so many people to leave the country and study in other countries.

The national image is also smeared by these strikes as they display poverty of leadership responsibility. As the nation gets lock up in unending negotiations of strike with the body that trains and qualifies its literate work force, it casts a shadow of underdevelopment on this country. Over the years, there have been growing concerns about the fall in the standard of education in Nigeria (Okebukola, 2002). One factor that can be attributed to this according to Saint, Hartnett and Strasner (2003) is the incessant strikes and the associated closure of institutions. All these phenomena affect our country in the scheme of things in the international arena. This strike becomes a reoccurring event with every administration of government; it shows inability on our leaders and our teachers. The major reason for strikes in higher education institutions have always been unfulfilled agreements, lack of adequate academic sponsorship, mismanagement of academic funds, non-payment of staff salaries and obnoxious government policies. These are all leadership challenge that affects us in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Universities as ivory tower of knowledge have very salient roles to play in the national development as well as manpower development. There expected roles in the development of the nation have often been forestalled due to federal and state governments intervention or encroachment in university autonomy. The frequency of industrial crisis/disputes was discovered to be high in the Nigerian university system. The problem of industrial relations in the Nigerian university system were found to be lack of education of some labour leaders, the rigid structure of relationships, lack of flow of communication, management and government meddling with union affairs, frequent trade disputes, under funding and inadequate teaching facilities. Political factors were also discovered as some of the causes of industrial disputes within the university system.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations as desirable:

- i. Both union leaders and management representatives should from time to time embark on training to understand the workings of industrial relations.
- ii. The government should develop actions such as organizing meetings and interactive sessions; that will help to check incessant industrial action in the education sector in Nigeria.
- iii. ASUU officials should always try to avoid any of their decisions that will lead to strike actions.
- iv. The school management should be sensitive to the needs of ASUU.



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