

African Research Review

International Multi-Disciplinary Journal,
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

AFRREV Vol. 12 (1), Serial No 49, January, 2018: 56-65

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print) ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v12i1.7>

Analysis of the Effects of Frequent Strikes on Academic Performance of Students in Universities in Nigeria: Edo State as a Focal Point

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Abstract

The history of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)'s strike can be traced back to 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 the oil wealth to generate production and a 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. However, questionnaires were administered to seek the opinions of the students in University of Benin (UNIBEN) and in Benson Idahosa University (BIU), Edo States and one thousand and fifty four staff and students were randomly selected. Nine hundred and seventy one respondents validly returned their questionnaire. From the analyzed data, it was observed that frequent strikes had adverse effects on the academic performance of students. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made that adequate measures should be put in place by government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) etc to check incessant strike in the educational system; and conclusively that government owned Universities should emulated private school owners by avoiding strikes and intensify efforts to convince ASUU on the evils of strikes to see that students would have enough time to study so that they can be able to face challenges in the Labour Market. This paper painstakingly appraised several of these issues and concluded that all stakeholders in the education sector and federal polity should

thread softly, be objective, rational, altruistic and magnanimous in order not to make the existence of true federalism (social, political, educational and economic cohesive existence of the people, peace and tranquillity) a fleeting illusion and a mirage.

Key words: ASUU, strikes, Academic performance, economic downturn, National Universities Commission

Introduction

Nigeria sovereign nation, more than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the neglect of education for Nigerian citizens in nation building, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, political assassinations, religious conflicts and federalism coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts (Uhunmwuangho & Epelle, 2011). The situation is worsened by the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities (Nigerian Tribune, 2002). The above statement from an editorial comment by a national daily in Nigeria indeed epitomises the central focus of this paper, the aim of which is to analyze the importance of education to democratic sustainability in Edo State in particular and Nigeria in general.

The history of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)'s strike can be traced back to 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 the oil wealth to generate production and a 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. Asia's orientation became radical, more concerned with broad national issues, and stood firmly against oppressive, undemocratic policies of the country (UNIBEN Strategic Plan, 2010).

The general economic downturn of the 1980s resulted in instability and financial inadequacy for the Nigerian educational system. Crisis between 1979 and 1999 led to several work stoppages. Regular occurrences include unpaid teachers' salaries, the degeneration of educational facilities and infrastructure at all levels and the attendant common place strikes across all tiers of Nigeria education system. Poor financial investment has generally been seen as the plague of Nigerian education system so much so that budgeting allocation has been very low compared to other sectors. The effect of the poor funding on students, apart from fear of increase in tuition fee or its introduction in federal university is that they are mostly ill equipped for self-employment and or entrepreneurship in a context where limited jobs exist to absorb them in the nation. The poor quality of many Nigerian university graduates has accelerated. As a result, there is high unemployment amongst graduates especially in fields such as engineering. There is also concern about the lack of recognition of Nigerian degrees by overseas universities (UNESCO, 2000).

The above statement led to incessant closures in academic institution in Nigeria, the effect of these repeated closures of schools and academic programmes on students' learning effectiveness can better be imagined than described. Tertiary education in Nigeria has thus suffered tremendous setbacks as a result of strikes by both the ASUU and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (SSANU). This has always subjected the students to pitiable conditions, disrupting academic programs, giving students' undeserved extension in their study years, poor students' concentration, performance on academic programmes and poor lecturer-student relationships amongst others. Consequently, students' academic performance

has comparatively become so low while various forms of examination malpractice are on the increase (Ebi, 2017).

University worldwide is regarded as the citadel of learning, the fountain of intellectual development and a ground for the production of leaders of tomorrow. According to Fafunwa (1999) a university fulfils, one major function, it is a knowledge and value provider, in other words, a university progresses when it is able to provide knowledge and value and when it is not properly managed by the administrators and staff, it then fails in its function of providing knowledge for service and value. Accordingly this explains why merit has been the watchword in the university system, an institution in which a student must first be certified worthy in character and learning before being admitted into the Honours' Degree.

Problems

It is not difficult to see that our country is brimming with frustrated young men and women. The more desperate among them form cult, kidnapping and armed robbery groups and take it out on the society. Sadly, their victims are not in a position to make things better for them. You are looking at the unacceptable face of a monumental national scandal, so many institutions, and so few opportunities for the training of our leaders of tomorrow. The problem is that the big people do not see this as a major national scandal. The majority of students in most of the higher institutions in the West African sub-region are Nigerians. These are the young men and women whose parents can afford to s parcel them off every year to more educationally salubrious institutions of higher learning. If they do not do that, their children and wards would remain here and be subjected to the yearly trauma of taking JAMB and IJMB (*Guardian*, 2017).

We have neglected education at the peril of our nation. We may continue to pretend that all is well. But a nation that lives a lie lives to regret it in the long term.

In 2017, the National Universities Commission (NUC) released list of approved Nigerian universities which showed that Nigeria had 152 Universities distributed as follows:

TABLE ONE: NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

S/No.	Universities	Number
1.	Federal Universities	40
2.	State Universities	44
3.	Private Universities	68
	TOTAL	152

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Since the Commission released these details, more private universities have been approved by the Executive Council of the Federation, thus shooting up their number to 74 (<http://campusbi.com.ng>).

Anyone looking at these numbers would be proud to be a Nigerian. Our country is not, God be praised, big for nothing. It has put its wealth where its heart is – Universities wise. It has more Universities than the universities in all the countries in the West African sub-region combined. However, in sheer numbers, our country has eclipsed all African countries in the establishment of universities. It means, obviously, that Nigeria turns out more university

graduates every year than do all African countries, north and south of the Sahara put together (Ajetomobi & Ayanwale, 2005).

Unfortunately, the numbers do not tell the full facts about university education in our country. The facts of our situation are less impressive. And it is a source of cold shame, not of warm pride. Take case number one. The university teachers, under the aegis of their union, ASUU, are back in the trenches, fighting an old battle over their welfare, poor staffing and a learning and teaching environment that is anything but conducive to teaching, research and learning. They labour under difficult conditions. Of the 152 universities, only a handful, according to the experts, do really qualify to be the citadels of learning. It is no secret that when the commission visits the universities to accredit courses, the university authorities hire and handsomely pay qualified men and women from overseas universities to present themselves as staff of the universities. They leave immediately the NUC Accreditation Panel leaves (Ita, 2017).

Consequently, we have not shown the courage to admit that our education is in serious crisis. Instead, we choose to pretend that all is well. We are jolted out of this ill-advised complacency only when the university teachers, the men and women who are saddled with the burden of teaching and researching in a difficult environment, drop their chalks and stay home, leaving their students to an uncertain fate. The failure by the Federal Government to negotiate seriously on the conditions in the universities led to the 1992 strike declared by NEC on May 14, 1992 and suspended after one week because of an Industrial Arbitration Panel (AIP) order for immediate suspension of the strike. Although the IAP ordered both sides to the negotiating table, Government did not resume negotiation. ASUU resume its strike immediately on July 20, 1993. ASUU was banned for a second time on August 23, 1992. ASUU had the support of the public, the professional organizations, NANS, etc. When all the tactics to break the strike failed the Federal Government had to devise a way of negotiating with a banned union. This took place between the Federal Governments Team led by Owelle Chikelu, the Minister of Establishment and Management Services, and representatives of ASNU (Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities) (Baiké, 2017)

The incessant industrial action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and all these industrial unions has inadvertently affected the academics of university students; it usually poses a lot of challenges to their study duration, performance in examinations and their final grading. The students are kept away from school for a long time; most of them are completely cut off from academics as conditions at home may not favour productive and rigorous academic exercise. The students and their parents become frustrated because of long expectation of school resumption that is far from sight. Some of the students while at home doing nothing get engaged in other things other than academics. In some cases they are easy recruits for criminal activities, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and rape and on the other hand encourage cultism. This has made them a problem to the society peace and order in Nigeria. It is against this background that the following hypothetical questions need to be answered (UNIBEN Convocation Speech, 2007).

1. What is the concept of ASUU in academic administration in Nigeria?
2. What are the causes of frequent ASUU strike in Nigerian Universities?
3. Who are the most affected whenever there is strike in Nigeria universities?

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain if inadequate funding hinders effective University administration in Edo State.
2. To examine whether strikes has influence on reading habits of students in Nigerian Universities in Edo State.
3. To investigate the impact of incessant strike on academic performance of students in Edo State.
4. To ascertain the problems associated with the implementation of agreement between ASUU and Federal Government
5. To examine whether strike have direct influence on students' overall academic performance.

Hypotheses

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant relationship between inadequate funding and University administration in Edo State.
2. There is no significant relationship between strike and reading habits of students in Nigerian Universities in Edo State
3. There is no significant relationship between the impact of incessant strike and academic performance of students in Edo State.
4. There is no significant relationship between the problems associated with the implementation of ASUU agreement and the Federal Government
5. There is no significant relationship between direct influence and overall academic performance in Edo State.

Theoretical Exposition: Pluralist and Unitarianism theories

The particular theories that can sufficiently act as a guide for the analysis of issues in this paper are Pluralist and Unitarianism theories. Each theory offers a particular perception of workplace relations and will therefore interpret such events as workplace conflict, the role of unions, strike or industrial action and job regulation differently.

(A) Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory sees conflict as inherent in workplaces. In pluralism, the organization is perceived as being made up of powerful and divergent sub-groups, each with its own legitimate loyalties and with their own set of objectives. In particular, the two predominant sub-groups in the pluralist perspective are the management and trade unions (Moja, 2007). Consequently, the role of management would lean less towards enforcing and controlling and more toward persuasion and co-ordination. Trade unions are deemed as legitimate representatives of employees; conflict is dealt by collective bargaining and is viewed not necessarily as a bad thing and, if managed, could in fact be channelled towards evolution and positive change. The theory of pluralism is a by-product of the concern of bourgeois oriented social scientists for „democratic“ and „stable“ political institutions in the face of the threats posed to the continued survival of capitalist democracies (parliamentary or military dictatorship) by the pressures of the struggles of the deprived working masses. The Pluralist doctrine is therefore a political theory which seeks to redress the shortcomings of a capitalist

political order with a view to prevent its overthrow and safeguard the status-quo (Natufe, 2006).

(B) Unitarianism Theory

In Unitarianism theory, the organization is perceived as an integrated and harmonious whole with the ideal of "one happy family", where management and other members of staff all share a common purpose, emphasizing mutual cooperation. Furthermore, Unitarianism has a paternalistic approach where it demands loyalty of all employees, being predominantly managerial in its emphasis and application, (Morgan, 2007). Conflict is perceived the pathological result of agitators, interpersonal friction and communication breakdown. The unitary approach posits the least amount of conflict. The unitary approach sees no conflict except as a pathological condition. This approach does not accept that there is any intrinsic conflict involving industry, labour and society. It sees industrial actions as a harmonious means of organizing society under normal circumstances. Unitary theory disputes that there is a meaningful role for conflict in the workplace. Unitarianism posits that management should set the rules and workers should cooperate in complying with the rules. Conflict is seen as disruptive. Managers and workers share a common interest and there is no need for "third party" interventions (Ekong, 2007).

The goal of the Unitarianism is to domesticate the whole of the social unit under his control (Hinchcliffe, 2012). The unitarist ruler alone can determine how society is to be organized, what the goals should be and what changes are desirable. Sectarian agitations/activity by workers, students, peasants, professionals, market women, etc., can only dissipate the national will and energy.

Literature Review

Several scholars have written on the Analysis of the Effects of Frequent Strikes on Academic Performance of Students in Universities in Nigeria. However, we shall review few of them as follows:

(a) Negative Influence of Strikes

By allowing the university teachers to embark on an indefinite strikes before opening any serious dialogue with their union, an erroneous impression is created that the government is impervious to dialogue and negotiations and that the only language it understands is strong-arm tactics – militancy in the Niger Delta or paralyzing Industrial Action by ASUU and other organized labour. Therefore a major lesson from the strikes is the yawning absence of any institutionalized mechanism for industrial arbitration in the country (Guardian, 2017). During the period of strikes, students, as a result of their idleness and frustration, engage in deviant behaviour like robbery, arson, rape, touting and constitute nuisance to the society. When they are apprehended, their academics are abruptly truncated. In the years past, the country had been made to suffer immense loss of brains to other countries. It is still happening, as a result of their search for greener pastures. With this marginal loss, few remaining ones are inadequate to build up the academic performance of the students.

Learning in Universities has been made irregular as students may have forgotten what they have learnt before the disruption of an academic session upon their resumption to school. Memory is lost if what is being learnt is not reactivated over time. Statistical reports have shown that majority of failures in University are recorded in examinations taken immediately after students return from a long break. The situation witnessed in the University academics has resulted in the turning out of half-baked graduates into the labour market. These half-

baked produced cannot live up to expectation in their various chosen professions. However, several undergraduates die in road accidents during the period of the strikes in an attempt to visit friends to vitiate boredom and idleness. There are however two seemingly positive effects (Adesina & Awosusi, 2004):

(b) Positive Influence of Strikes

Strikes when moderately implemented are indicative of the positive human rights posture of government and that of a democracy; we give allowance for the labour law which empowers workers to express their grievances through strikes. It would appear that the major gains of the Nigerian university system in terms of improved conditions of service for staff and improvement in the physical conditions for teaching, learning and research have been attained as dividends of strikes. There is no university system in the world that has no strike history. However, in Nigeria it is at the extreme, with strikes lingering for months. In North America, Europe and Asia where the top-ranking universities are found, strikes last for a few hours or maximum of one day (Morgan, 2007).

However, this paper sought lasting solution to incessant strikes which has hampered good and perfect academic excellent in Nigerian Universities and academic performance by going further to examine the influence strikes as a whole have on both reading, learning, memory and general performance of students in the University of Benin and Benson Idahosa University, Edo State.

Methodology

This research adopted a descriptive survey method. The method was based on selected Universities, University of Benin and Benson Idahosa University both in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The scope of the study is therefore restricted to only two Universities, University of Benin and Benson Idahosa University, Benin City. The population of the study consisted of 1,054 respondents, based on two categories (Academic staff and Students) (see table two). Out of this number, nine hundred and seventy one of them met our criteria and therefore form our sample size as can be seen in table two below:

Table 2: Population of Study/Rate of Returned Survey Questionnaire

S/N	Universities	Category of Respondents	No. of Returned Questionnaires	No. of Not Returned/Invalid Questionnaires	Total No. of Sampled Respondents
1.	University of Benin	Academic	420	31	640
		Students	180	09	
2.	Benson Idahosa University	Academic	230	26	414
		Students	141	17	
Total			971	83	1,054

Source: Field Survey 2017

Both Primary and Secondary sources of data were explored in trying to generate data for this study. The specific information required for the study was poor students academic performance, effect of strike on students academic performance, funding of higher educational institutions in Nigeria, poor reading habits of students among others. The questionnaire formed the main instrument used in generating primary data, while documented

information on prints that are relevant to this study, constituted the secondary source of data. To compliment the information received through the questionnaire, respondents were also interviewed. As the research is based on attitude and opinions, the statistical tools employed in analyzing responses include, tables and simple percentages. Out of the one thousand and fifty four copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, nine hundred and seventy one studied were duly completed and returned in a useable form. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Of all the nine hundred and seventy one respondents, eighty (47%) of them are married; fifty (29%) are single while twenty one (13%) are divorced and the remaining nineteen (11%) are either widow or widowers. Thirty (18%) of them are within the age bracket of 18–25, Fifty (29%) are between the age bracket of 26-35; while eighty (47%) are within the age bracket of 36-45 and the remaining forty six years and above are ten (6%).

Table 3: Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between inadequate funding and University administration in Edo State

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	670	65
No	301	35
Total	971	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 3 above shows that 670 (65%) of the total respondents agreed that inadequate funding of Universities hinders poor academic performance of students conversely responsible for the dwindling academic activities in Nigeria. Therefore, the hypothesis one which states that there is no significant relationship between inadequate funding and University administration in Edo State is accepted.

Table 4: Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between strike and reading habits of students in Nigerian Universities in Edo State

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	715	62
No	256	38
Total	971	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 4 shows that 715 (62%) of the respondents agreed that strike and reading habits of students is responsible for students poor academic performance while 256 (38%) were not satisfied or disagreed.

Table 5: Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between the impact of incessant strike and academic performance of students in Edo State

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	740	71
No	230	29
Total	971	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 5 shows that 740 (71%) of the respondents agreed that the impact of incessant strike contributed immensely to poor academic performance of students while 230 (29%) disagreed with the opinion. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between the impact of incessant strike and academic performance of students is accepted.

Findings Based On Hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the hypotheses, all the research hypotheses were positive which implies that (H_r) 1-3 were accepted.

More so, the study revealed that incessant strike in tertiary institution impacted positively on poor academic performance of students. However, the desire of every university student is to complete his or her academic programmes without any hitch, but as it turns out in contemporary Nigeria society, ASUU strikes have placed limitations on this aspiration, apart from the fact that the strikes elongate the study duration of university students, the performance of students in academic activities are hampered, so much so that good and brilliant students end up graduating with poor grades.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, this paper revealed that the epileptic academic calendar in Nigerian Universities, particularly University of Benin and Benson Idahosa University which are the focal points; is responsible for poor academic records as per the attestation in the hypothesis and findings of this paper. Consequently, avoidable conflict between the government and ASUU must not be allowed to jeopardize the academics and future of Nigerian students. Education in Nigeria must be given its pride of place; the government must strive hard to meet the United Nation's minimum standard. Nigerian Universities cannot be locked up permanently and think ASUU and government will move about comfortably.

Arising from the result of the analysis and the conclusion made there from, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- (a) Adequate measures should be put on ground by government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities and other stakeholders to check incessant strike in the educational system.
- (b) Academic staff of Universities should ensure that a cordial relationship exists between them and their employer.
- (c) Government owned Universities should emulate private school owners by avoiding strikes and intensify efforts to convince ASUU on the evils of strikes to see that students would have enough time to study so that they can be able to face challenges in the Labour Market.

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