



# Impact of Strike Actions on Academic Performance

Achugbu Collins M.

Department of Education, Kampala International University Uganda

## ABSTRACT

University is the fortress of knowledge for building future leaders. Regrettably, public universities in Nigeria are facing a lot of challenges. One such challenge is the incessant strike embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The root causes of the ASUU strike include inadequate funding of public universities, imposition of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIIS) in federal universities, none release of earned academic allowance to lecturers, poor remuneration, the proliferation of universities particularly by state government without adequate funding of existing ones and the failure of the federal government to implement agreement entered to ASUU. The failure of the government to address these issues prompts ASUU to embark on series of industrial actions. Strike actions often times bring about disruption in an institution's academic calendar. Once there is strike action, it gives room for calendar adjustment which will inevitably affect the smooth running of educational program in the country. This paper therefore assessed the impact of strike actions on academic performance: It maintains that the strike by academic unions have had a devastating effect on Nigeria's educational system and by extension their academic performance. Consequently, the government should set up special grants to fund public universities, while academic staff should explore other means to press home their demands rather than embark on strike actions always.

**Keywords:** Strike, Impact, Performance, Academic, Staff Union

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's education system comprises primary, secondary, and tertiary [1-5]. While primary and secondary education is the foundation level for preparing pupils into higher educational institutions, tertiary education is an advanced education system in which students are trained, and developed to become professionals in their respective disciplines and for career advancement [6-10]. In Nigeria, tertiary education is provided by Monotechnics, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, and Universities. Of all the institutions mentioned above, it is the university that provides the highest level of education leading to the award of Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. Degrees. University is the fortress of knowledge for building future leaders [11-16]. It is sad to say that public universities in Nigeria are facing a lot of challenges. One such challenge is the incessant strike embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) [17-20]. The root causes of the ASUU strike include inadequate funding of public universities, imposition of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIIS) in federal universities, none release of earned academic allowance to lecturers, poor remuneration, the proliferation of universities particularly by state government without adequate funding of existing ones and the failure of the federal government to implement agreement entered to ASUU [21-26]. The failure of the government to address the above-mentioned issues has prompted ASUU to embark on a series of industrial actions in the past two decades [27-30]. From 2010 to 2022, ASUU embarked on eight (8) industrial actions. ASUU spent over 1,068 days in these strike actions which is more than two academic sessions [31-35]. During these strikes, all academic activities such as lectures, conferences, seminars, etc. are suspended forcing students to stay at their homes for months [36-40]. There is no doubt the ASUU strike actions will affect the standards of university education and by extension the academic performance of lecturers in public universities [41-46]. This unstable industrial relation climate in Nigeria just within the decades has resulted in all-time record of lost working hours, and unprecedented work stoppage as a result of strike action. Against this backdrop, this study evaluates the effect of strike action on staff performance [47-51].

### Concept of Strike Action

In the words of [4], strike is seen as a collective organized cessation or slowdown of work by employees to force acceptance of their demand by the employers. The legality of the strike action requires approval by the majority of employees by ballot, independent verification to ascertain that the majority support the vote; the notice of the impending strike must be given to employers in advance; the employer must be provided with the result of the ballot; final notice to embark on the strike must be issued to the employers before the action takes place [52-58]. This implies that no strike action can occur without the government (employers of labor) knowing or being warned about it. It is therefore the failure of the employer to yield to the demand of the employees that result in

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industrial dispute. [5], posits that strike is the most visible and controversial form of collective action in the event of a labour dispute and is often seen as the last resort of organizations in pursuit of their demands. Section 2(q) of the Industrial Dispute Act defines strike as cessation of work by a body of persons employed in any industry acting in combination; 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 to accept employment [59-63]. [7], defined strike as a concerted and temporary withholding of employee's service from the employers so as to exact greater concession than the employer is willing to grant at the bargaining table. The possibility of a strike is the ultimate economic force a union brings to bargaining table. Strike can be understood as a curtailment of work, due to the collective refusal of workers to work, which occurs as a response to employee grievances [64-69]. It involves, dropping out of work by any number of workers, employed in a particular industry, with an aim of creating pressure on the employers to accept their demands relating to pay scale, working conditions, trade practices and so forth. Strike action or job action refers collectively to any measure taken by trade unions or other organized labour meant to reduce productivity in a workplace [70-74]. Quite often, it is used and interpreted as a euphemism for strike or mass strike, but the scope is much wider [8]. Industrial actions, such as strikes, work bans and sabotage may be taken by unions, employees or employers in pursuit of a new collective agreement. Such action, however, is prohibited during the life of an agreement [8]. It can be measured in three dimensions: the number of strikes and lock-outs; the number of affected workers; and the number of working days lost [9]. A period of time during which a formally organized group of employees of a corporation refuses to work due to a dispute over wages or working conditions is referred to as a strike action, according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. A strike, often known as industrial action or just a strike, is a work stoppage brought on by widespread employee un-cooperation. Typically, a strike is called in response to an employee's complaints. According to its etymology, the term "strike" was first used in 1768 when sailors supporting a protest in London tore off the top sails of commercial ships in port, crippling the ships. The phrase is used in official documents as "work stoppage or Industrial dispute." When the 20th dynasty was coming to a close, there was the first strike action account that has been historically verified. [10], claimed that a strike is viewed as a collectively organized halt or delay of work by employees to force employers to concede to their demands. The majority of workers must approve the strike action by ballot in order for it to be legal, and there must also be independent verification that the majority of employees agree with the vote. Additionally, employers must be notified in advance of the impending strike, as well as the results of the vote and a final notice before the strike begins. This suggests that no strike action can take place without the government (labor employers) being made aware of it or given a warning.

#### **Academic Staff Unions**

Academic staff unions are in the context of labour relation. It is the continuous relationship between lecturers and the government. Their relation includes negotiation of contract about pay, hour and other terms and condition of employment. [11], established that trade unions are seen as the legitimate representative of labours and conflicts arising from the clash of interest are resolved, if possible by bargaining and compromise and if not, by overt power. [9], is of the opinion that the fundamental purpose of trade union is to promote and protect the interest of their members. They are to redress the balance of power between employers and employees. The study adjudged it necessary to narrow down this conceptualization to the specific Labour union of interest, Association of Academic Staff of University (ASUU).

#### **Performance of Academic Staffs**

Academic staff, often known as faculty personnel, are critical components of higher education institutions, especially universities [12]. Academic staff, as the name implies, are professionals who administer teaching and research programs in higher education, as well as providing other academic services. Academic staff implement teaching at educational institutions, and thus their influence on the advancement of higher education institutions cannot be overestimated [13]. Academic staff are professionals who teach or lecture at higher education institutions. They are referred to as lecturers. At the institutions, they perform three critical functions: teaching, research, and community service. Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor/Reader, and Professors are the academic staff classifications. According to [14], an academic staff member can also be defined as a member of an institution of higher learning (in this case, a university) with an academic viewpoint or a scholarly background. [13], further adds that, the professional qualities of academic staff include: commitment to academic research, commitment to high quality teaching and fostering a positive learning environment for students, commitment to continuous professional development, and commitment to public communication. Academic staff's professional skills also include: excellent interpersonal, oral, and written communication skills; the ability to conduct high quality research, as evidenced by authorship of high-quality publications or other research outputs in computer science; the ability to manage time and work to strict deadlines; and the ability to teach and supervise academic work by undergraduates, master's, and doctoral students [13].

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Wikipedia (2014) supports the ideas above by stating that academic achievement is frequently assessed through evaluation (examination) and ongoing assessment, but there is no consensus on the most effective way to do so. In the linked study by [15], it was noted, among other things, that learning environments and conditions have a significant impact on students' academic achievement. Academic performance is an indication of how well a student satisfies the standards set by the institution. Academic success is determined by the student's performance. According to [16], academic performance mainly relates to how well a student is completing their assignments and studies. The study highlights that grades, which serve as students' "scores" throughout their entire stay, are the most well-known metric of academic performance. Grades are frequently the average of assignments, ongoing assessments, and final exams during a semester, all of which are frequently impacted by factors such as student psychological health, attendance, learning environment, etc. Academic achievement, as defined by [17], is the degree of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has attained in a subject area as opposed to one's potential as determined by examinations. According to [18], cited in [17], academic performance is measured by how much a learner benefits from instruction in a particular subject area; in other words, a student's success is determined by the amount of skill and knowledge that has been taught to him. Given the wide range of academic achievement and the fact that it encompasses a wide range of educational outcomes, this study theorized academic achievement as a multi-faceted construct whose definition depends on the indicator used to measure it.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Conflict Theory**

The study is anchored on Ralf Dahrendorf conflict theory, propounded in 1959. The theory arose out of the evaluation of Karl Marx's conflict theory. He accepted that Marx's position of capitalism as the cause of conflict in the 19th century was accurate; but argued that in the 20th century, it has become inappropriate as the basis for explaining the cause of conflict in modern society. Dahrendorf argued that significant changes have taken place in modern societies like Great Britain and the United States of America which are now post-capitalist societies [19]. Dahrendorf averred that, far from the two main classes becoming separated, as Marx had predicted, the opposite has occurred. The percentage of skilled and semi-skilled workers has increased, likewise the size of the new middle class of white-collar workers such as clerks, nurses, and teachers. Inequality in income and wealth has been reduced, partly because of measures taken by the state. Social mobility has become a common thing, and more notably, the link between ownership and control in industries has been broken. Managers, rather than owners, now exercise day-to-day control of the means of production of goods and services [19]. Based on these circumstances, Marxists' assertion that conflict was caused by ownership and non-ownership of wealth was no longer accepted. In light of the above, Dahrendorf argued that conflict is not a result of the existence of the two classes (Bourgeoisie and Proletariats) identified by Marx, nor does conflict result from economic division. Rather, Dahrendorf saw conflict as being centered on authority [19]. To Dahrendorf, authority is the recognized power attached to the occupation of a particular social role within an organization. All organizations as Dahrendorf averred have positions of domination and subjection. He stated that some can take decisions lawfully and issue commands, while others cannot. For instance, the government can take certain decisions that affect workers in the country, notwithstanding the wishes of the workers based on the authority and the dominant position the government occupies. It is this situation according to Dahrendorf that is the basis of conflict in modern societies. He held that the existence of dominant and subordinate positions in organizations or associations leads to different interests. Those occupying dominant positions like the Federal Government of Nigeria for instance have an interest in maintaining the social structure that gives them more authority than others. On the other hand, those in subordinate positions such as Academic unions have an interest in changing it [19]. This theory is relevant to this study because, it can be reasonably assumed that the authority wielded by the Federal Government gives them the right to take certain decisions concerning university education in the country without consulting the unions in the university. When these decisions contradict the interest of the unions in public universities such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), there is bound to be conflict that may manifest through the grievances of ASUU members thereby resulting in strike action.

#### **Empirical Review**

[20], carried out an empirical study on the effect of strike action on human development among social studies secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area of AkwaIbom State, with the objective of assessing the extent to which disruption in academic program in secondary schools due to strike affect students' learning effectiveness in social studies. The methodology adopted by the study is survey inferential research design. The study found out that disruption in academic program resulting from strike leads to closure of schools for a period of time. This period may be specific or indefinite thereby affecting students; learning of the curriculum, hence their development. Disruptions of academic programme resulting from strike action give students undeserved study year extension. [21], explored the incessant conflicts and strikes and their effect on the achievement of goals of business education in tertiary institution in Ekiti State. It adopted descriptive research survey design. The finding

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shows that incessant strike contributed immensely to the challenges confronting tertiary institutions in the state. It was also revealed that incessant strikes contributed to the mass failure on the part of the student, and concluded that the study showed that personnel policies have not been effective in preventing conflict and strike behaviours because management are not sincere and committed to matters that concern the staff. [22], examined the impact of incessant strikes on skills acquisition in business education with the aim of selecting the strike action within a specified period to project its impact on skill acquisition in business education programme with the help of survey methodological approach. It is revealed by the study that strike has become the order of the day in Nigeria educational system being the only language understood by the employer (government) and it has a great impact on business education which is essentially based on skill acquisition. The study concludes that incessant strikes has hampered the basic skill acquisition that business education students were supposed to acquire over the years. [23], explored Industrial action in schools: strikes and student achievement. The focus of the research is grade 3 and 6 students in Maths, Reading and Writing in 1996/97 academic year. The data used are student's scores from education quality and accountability Office (EAQAO). The study concluded that teachers strike in grade 5 or 6 have negative impact on test score growth between grade 3 and 6. [24], researched on the effects of teacher strike activity on student learning in South African primary schools, the study adopted a cross section analysis using the students fixed effects to eliminate sources endogeneity bias at student's level. The findings of the study revealed that teachers strike have negative effects on learning of students in South Africa. From the foregoing, the study uncovered the fact that none of the existing studies adopted ExPost facto Analysis and focuses on University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria. Moreover, the existing studies adopted descriptive and inferential survey design without representing the academic performance variable by Grade Point Average (GPA) except the few research works like [23, 24] which their centers of attention are Canada and South Africa respectively

#### **Impact of Strike action on Academic Performance of Staffs**

Strike actions often times bring about disruption in an institution's academic calendar [25]. Once there is strike action, it will give room for calendar adjustment which will inevitably affect the smooth running of Technical education program in the country [26]. According to [27], once there is strike action, institutions/schools are forced to close down and there will be a temporary stoppage of teaching and learning activities in the concerned institutions. She went further to note that this temporary refusal of lecturers to work will in turn result in developing and redesigning new academic calendar in order to make up for the period lost. Strike actions have serious implication on the morale of academic staff. Though strikes actions are embarked upon to achieve certain demands but when the periods extend longer than necessary, the morale of lecturers may not be that high. Most lecturers may find it difficult to carry out their research work freely because of low morale which is a function of the prolonged strike actions. There is no doubt that workers may not find it easy to attend conferences, workshops or seminars during these periods due to low morale which is resulting from the incessant strike [27]. Wastage of manpower hours also occurs whenever the trade unions embark on prolonged strike in the Nigerian public universities. Time resources wasted cannot be recovered. Economic wastage too cannot be quantified. According to [28], strike actions in the tertiary institutions is another factor responsible for resources wastage in the system. Every higher institution operates with academic calendar and budget. The academic calendar is designed for 16 to 18 weeks with budgetary provision for the implementation of every plans and programme in the calendar. The alteration of this calendar by either strike actions or any internal or external factors will lead to additional cost on the administration of the institutions, students and teachers. [28], submitted that frequent strikes by students and the teachers, which disrupt academic activities is another cause of education wastage. Consequently, some students drop out of school when they think their time is being wasted. Some of these drop-outs oftentimes end up as touts or even waste their lives as criminals, drug addicts, thieves or political thugs [28]. [28], acknowledged that during strike actions by all labour unions in the universities, nearly all administrative and academic activities are grounded. [29], argued that some academic staff that on academic training or that are pursuing their various master and PhD programme in the various public universities are also affected by the strike. The strike also affects the staff development programme too. [28], stressed that strike actions by different union and groups within higher education institutions, especially by non-teaching staff, affect the administration of the continuous development program of higher education institutions in the country. Nigerian higher education institutions are known for strike actions due to the failure of the government or school administrators to implement agreements entered into by both parties [28]. Entire programs of higher education institutions are closed down whenever there is a strike action by major trade union groups. Teaching, research and even community service activities are suspended during strike actions. Thus, the administration of professional development programs is also affected since it resides in the institutions. The prolonged strike actions embarked on by them, have led to suspension of students research work and personal research works of some academic staff. Strike actions have great implication on academic research in public universities. [28], agreed that strike action by different unions in the public universities in Nigeria is a very enormous challenge facing the administration of research programme in the



universities. The refusal of the federal government to implement the agreement reached with the different unions in the universities leads to the incessant strike actions. Academic research is an integral aspect of education because of its role in revamping and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Technical education. Once there is incessant strike action, students and researchers may not be motivated to go into academic research [27]. During this period, research students find it difficult to gain access to their supervisors. This has a way of negatively affecting the volume of research works and thereby leading to a state of comatose in educational institutions especially public universities.

### CONCLUSION

The strike by academic unions have had a devastating effect on Nigeria's educational system and by extension the their academic performance. Consequently, the Federal Government should endeavor to increase the wages and other emoluments of lecturers in public universities in the country in line with their counterparts in other climes. Additionally, the government should set up special grants which should be released annually to fund public universities in the country. Lastly, academic staff should explore other means such as peaceful protests within their respective university campuses to press home their demands rather than embark on strike actions always.

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