

INCESSANT STRIKE ACTIONS: IMPLICATIONS ON STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study explored the implication of the incessant strike action by academic staff unions on the students. The research revealed that strike action disrupts academic calendar which bestowed on students psyche cost, disheartenment and unable to speedily regenerate themselves towards academic exercises at the resumption and consequently, poor academic performance . The Study recommends amongst others that whatever the grievances, academic union and other bodies that operate in education sector should not resort to the strike as weapon of bargaining. Joint Consultation Committee should be set up and meet on periodic intervals to discuss impending matters that could generate dispute. Nigeria governments should respect the sanctity of the contract and desist from defaulting whenever they enter into agreement with unions. Nigeria government should also abstain from action and inaction that would hampered the achievement of national objectives: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a land of full opportunities for all Nigerians.

Introduction

Over the years universities have played dominant roles in the developed world. Universities are usually in the forefront of any social, economic and political challenges, especially with the power of research being focused on areas that will promote human development and solve existential problems. It is said that the use of the English word “STRIKE” first appeared in 1768 when sailors in support of demonstrations in wooden “struck” or removed the topgallant sails of merchant ships at port, thus crippling the ships.

Education, the process that involves all round development of cognitive, psychomotor and affective ability of individuals in the society in order to promote the advancement of the individuals, society and the world at large should not be relegated to the background in whatever manner. The cacophony between

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the central authority and the staff unions should not be extended to the point of jeopardizing the success of our education system which will in turn have undesirable effects on the academic achievement of the students. Bearing in mind, no nation can develop beyond the capacity of her citizens. Staff industrial actions in Nigeria University, Polytechnic and College of Education systems have become the common phenomenon with the detrimental effects on the academic commitment and success of Nigeria students.

Despite the fact that tongue and mouth are inseparable, clash between the two is inevitable. As long as the academic staff union and employer (government) represented by politicians are at variance in belief and philosophy there is bound to be industrial dispute between the two. The action and counteraction of the academic staff union (ASUU, ASUP and COEASU) in recent years to recalcitrant attitude of the federal government towards the past agreement; conditions of service, salaries and allowances, adequate funding as prescribed by UNESCO, University autonomy, integration of polytechnic academic staff payroll had led to frequent industrial action by COEASU, ASUP and specifically ASUU. These unions have resulted to employment of strike as the last resort to balance the power between their staff and the government when the bargaining and consultation failed to yield desirable result. Implying that the only language understands by the government is strike action.

The counteraction of the academic staff unions to actions and inaction of the government is not self-centered but incited by the quest to resuscitate the acclaimed fall in Nigeria education standard. The specific evidence to this fact are the agitation by ASUU and ASUP between 2013 and 2014 which includes improvement and provision of educational infrastructure in our dilapidated tertiary instructions; fulfilling 26% budgetary allocation to education as prescribed by UNESCO so that Nigeria education system would be able to turn out the graduates that are capable of taking up the task of national development and be globally competitive like in the 70's when Nigeria graduates were accorded high esteem at the global stage.

Furthermore, it is incontrovertible that agitations of academic staff unions are to foster the adequate conditions of service which would go a long way in stimulating advantageous atmosphere for students to accomplish the prerequisite curriculum objectives. And, this would reduce to the barest minimum if not to zero level the half-baked graduates or functional illiterates that Nigeria tertiary institutions are turning out lately. Unfortunately, the strike action that is always embarked upon by the staff unions whenever there is industrial dispute between them and their employer (government) always put

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students at the detrimental conditions. The reasons for this are not farfetched; they end up having lesser period to prepare for academic exercises before summative evaluation hence possibility of poor academic performance. After the whole struggle, the academic staff salaries and allowances that were withhold during the industrial action would end up being paid.

Aside the bad reputation the strikes conferred on Nigeria education system; delayed and extension of duration of students in school in the face of age sensitive or discriminating Nigeria labour market which plummet the economic value of the graduates in Nigeria labour market. And, unjust compression of the syllabus and academic calendar which deprived students of adequate academic preparation and eventually have undesirable effects on the students achievement of educational objectives as laid down in the prescribed curriculum which paved way for the production of half-baked graduates by Nigerian tertiary institutions is of great concern to the study at hand. In view of this, the specific objective of this investigative study is to determine the repercussion effect of staff union strike action on the students' academic performance to proffer the policy prescriptions that would mitigate this undesirable incident in Nigeria education system.

Conceptual Overview

Labour (Academic Staff) Union

Allen (2007), defined labour union as an organization of employees that uses collective action to advance its members' interest in regards to wages and working conditions. They form or join because of the belief that there is strength in unity. Trade Union Decree 1973 as cited by Babafaros (2013) viewed labour union as any combination of temporary and permanent workers or employees, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers. Academic staff unions are in the context of labor 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.

Rosemary (1993) 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. Emenyonu (2006) is of the opinion that the fundamental purpose of trade union is to promote and protect the interest of their members.

Strike

Allen (2007) documented that strike is an effort by employee to withhold work so that the employer will make greater concessions at the bargaining table. It is opined that it is a major bargaining weapon used by the labour union. It is varied from economic strike where the employees stop work until the demand for better condition of employment is met to sit-down strike where employee strike but remain at work place. Emenyowu (2006) asserted that strikes are most politically charged of all the features of industrial relation. Strikes are too often a weapon of first rather than last resort. However, labour unions have recognized that a strike is a legitimate last resort if all else fails. Babafaros (2013) sees strike as a temporary stoppage of work aimed at forcing the employers to accept employees demand.

Strike is seen as Collective organized, cessation or slowdown of work by employees, to force acceptance of their demands by the employer. The legality of the strike action requires: approval by the majority of employees by ballot; independent verification to ascertain the majority support the vote; the notice of impending strike must be given to employer 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 employer (Business dictionary, 2015).

International Labour Organisation (2011) 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 workers' 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 (Saharay, 2013).

Causes of Strike

Strikes have in many ways featured in the educational sectors. Some of the causes of strike in the school system according to Otitigbe (2016) are:

1. Non-payment of salaries and arrears.
2. Failure to promote teachers for years.
3. Inability of the government to properly fund the schools.
4. Undue interference by government in management of the school.
5. Poor condition of service and breach of collective agreement by government.

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Impact of Strike action on Students

Mellisa, (2012), emphasized that academic performance indicates how well a student meets standard set out by the institution. A student success is measured by academic performance. Ige (2014), generally refers academic performance to how well a student is accomplishing his or her tasks and studies. The study emphasizes that Grades is the most well-known indicator of academic performance, grades are student's "scores" for their overall tenure. Grades are often the average of assignment, continuous assessment and semester terminal evaluation that are often affected by student psychological status, attendance, education environment etc. Lawrence (2013) described academic achievement as the level of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has achieved in an academic area, as opposed to one's potential in the educational goal measured by examinations. Aremu, Salako and Adedina (2015) sees academic performance as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instruction in a given area of learning i.e. achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill and knowledge has been imparted to him. It is obvious that they do not specify how best the profit from learning can be measured.

Olaniyi and Aina (2014), documented that academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicates the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college and university. The study conceptualized academic achievement to be a multi-faceted construct that comprises various domain of learning, because of this wide-ranging of academic achievement and the fact that it covers a broad varieties of educational outcomes hence its definition depends on the indication used to measure it. Against this background, the researchers concluded that the more curricular-based as measured by G.P.A (Grade Point Average) is most reliable and objective indicator and it is being adopted by the study at hand.

Edinyang and Ubi (2013), carried out empirical study on the effect of strike action on human development among social studies secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. With the objective of assessing the extent 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 and the focus of the research is secondary school in Uyo. The study finds 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.

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Disruptions of academic programme resulting from strike action give students undeserved study year extension.

Akindele (2014), researched on towards the stemming of the tide of strikes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria: stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. The study used slight descriptive statistics and expository style in its analysis. The study finally recommended that to stem the tide of strike and move tertiary institution forward, an effective administration of tertiary institutions, adequate funding of education/tertiary education by government, orientation of staff of tertiary institutions are necessary.

Osuorji and David (2014), investigated the effect of incessant strikes on academic performance of business education students in Abu, Zaria. Aiming to determine the extent to which the strike action has affected academic performance of business education students in ABU, Zaria; and to assess the perception of students about incessant strikes on academic performance of Business Education in ABU, Zaria. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The result shows that incessant strikes by lecturers have a resultant effect on the academic performance of the students of business education programme in ABU, Zaria.

Olaniyi and Aina (2014), worked on the incessant strikes and its effects on business education programme; the study adopted the expository dimension in its analysis and brief survey of what industrial action is. It concluded that failure to resolve and find a lasting solution to the challenges posed by incessant strikes would amount to an evasion of the deeper roots of the problem in Nigeria education.

Ayeni and Kolawole (2014), 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 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.

Olupayimo (2014), 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

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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 had hampered basic skill acquisition business education students were supposed to acquire over the years.

Baker (2013), explored Industrial action in schools: strikes and student achievement. The focus of the research is grade 3 and 6 students in Math's, 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.

Willsom (2014), 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.

According to Orimi (2013), effect of teachers strike could lead to absenteeism by the teachers of the school. This will make the teacher to come to school whenever he/she likes knowing that that after the exam students will be promoted to the next level thereby causing more harm to the students as the needed knowledge was not impacted.

During the period of strike, students as a result of their idleness and frustration engage in deviant behavior like robbery, arson, rape etc. when they are apprehended, and their academic 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 (Olugbenga, 2011).

Adeniram (2008) posit that learning in the university has been made irregular as students may have forgotten what they have learnt before the disruption of the academic session upon their resumption to school. Memory is lost if what is being learned is not reactivated overtime.

Statistics has revealed that majority of failures in university are recorded in examination taken immediately after students return from long break. The situation is witnessed in the university academics have resulted in the turning out of half-baked graduates into the market. These half-baked products cannot live up to their various chosen professions. This is as a result of poor learning necessitated by poor services from aggrieved lecturers.

Conclusion

The disruptions of academic session by Staff union industrial actions have significant undesirable negative impact on academic success of the students. The students' academic success suffered greatly from the incidence of strike action in Nigeria tertiary institutions as the disruption of academic calendar bestowed on the students psyche cost, disheartenment and unable to speedily regenerate themselves towards academic exercises at the resumption.

Consequently, poor academic performance is inevitable. This has been one of the prominent causes of the half-baked and unemployable graduates that Nigeria education system has been turning out lately. The findings of this research work conform to the work of Osuorji and David (2014), Baker (2013), Wills (2014), Olaniyi and Aina (2014), Ayeni and Kolawole (2014), Olupaimo (2014) and Ajayi (2014).

The research concludes that strike action serves as drag to the academic success of the students with the negative far reaching effect on the Nigeria education system. It causes unreasonable extension of the programme which has aftermath effect on the economy through millions of labour hours lost.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the work, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Study recommends that no matter the grievances, academic union and other union bodies that operate in education sector should not resort to the strike as weapon of bargaining.
2. Joint Consultation Committee that would comprise government representative, academic staff representative, representative of other relevant stakeholders in the education sector should be set up and meet on periodic intervals to discuss impending matters that could generate dispute. This committee should be backed up with the necessary legislations and the decision made thereof should be final and binding on the governments, and the unions.
3. Nigeria governments should also respect the sanctity of the contract and desist from defaulting whenever they enter into agreement with unions.
4. Nigeria government should abstain from action and inaction that would hampered the achievement of national objectives: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant

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nation; a great and dynamic economy; a land of full opportunities for all Nigerians.

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