

# Impact of Strike actions on Students of Public Universities in Nigeria and the Way Forward

*Chinwuba Mary Adanna<sup>1</sup>, Niyi Jacob Ogunode<sup>2</sup>*

## **Annotatsiya:**

**Purpose:** This paper examined the impact of strike actions on the students of public universities in Nigeria.

**Method:** Content analysis method was employed in the paper. Data used were both primary and secondary data. The data were sourced from online and print resources.

**Conclusion:** The paper concludes that prolonged graduation, academic performance, social vices, learning loss, unstable learning programme, increment in learning cost, foreign education, mental health challenges, waning interest in educational system, brain drain, waste of accommodation rent are the impact of strike actions on the public universities students in Nigeria.

**Recommendation:** The government both federal and state government should increase the funding of public universities and ensure all agreement reached with the different unions are implemented as agreed upon.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Actions, Impact, Strike, students, Public Universities, Unions.

## **Introduction**

Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigerian (Ogunode, 2020). Public universities are universities established by act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and communities services (Ogunode, 2020). The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education has the following aims: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2014).

The Nigerian public universities is confronted with many challenges. Strike actions is one of the major problem faced with the institutions (Ogunode, & Ohibime (2021); Ogunode, & Ohibime (2021); Ogunode, Okwelogu (2022); Ogunode & Ohunene, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, Tope Gloria (2022) Ogunode, Zhenseh, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). Research showed that Nigerian university students have been forced out of the classroom for more than four years due to the frequent strikes embarked upon by the members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) since the return of democracy to the country in 1999. Leadership (2022) revealed that the lecturers' union's ongoing strike is the 16th since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, shutting down academic activities in public universities for a cumulative period of more than four years within 23 years, a duration that is sufficient to complete a four-year degree programme, with some strikes lasting few weeks and others for several months.

The frequent and prolonged industrial actions by ASUU have been a source of concern to most students of public universities in the country, their parents and other stakeholders. For decades, Nigerian public universities have been encountering challenges of poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, obsolete educational system, dilapidated structures and equipment, brain drain and successive governments have not been able to proffer solutions to these problems. ASUU, a trade union formed in 1978 to represent the interests of academic staff in all of the federal and state universities in the country, whose objectives include regulation of relations between academic staff and employers, has always been at loggerheads with the government. Under present government's administration, undergraduates in universities across the country have lost at least 13 months from their educational calendar owing to the recurring strikes by ASUU. Educationists say this explains why the products of Nigerian public universities are half-baked and certificates obtained from Nigerian universities are not rated high outside the shores of the country (Leadership 2022). The first ASUU strike under the Buhari administration began on August 17, 2017 after the government defaulted on the MOU it had signed with the union. Out of

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<sup>1</sup> University of Abuja, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Education, University of Abuja

the N1.3trn requested by ASUU, only N200bn was paid, which caused the association to embark on a one-week warning strike in November 2016 to press for their funds. The strike ended in September 2017 (Leadership,2022).

There are many factors responsible for strike actions but this paper will focus on underfunding Lawan & Ogunode (2021), inadequate infrastructural facilities Ogunode, Abubakar, & Ajape (2021); Ogunode, Yiolokun, & Akeredolu, (2019) ; Ogunode & Abubakar (2020); Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Aud, Ajape (2020), non-implementation of agreement and enrolment into Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) by all the public higher institutions (Ogunode & Audu (2022); Ogunode & Ndayebom, (2022); Ogunode, Ezema, & Olugbenga 2022). It is imperative to examine the impact of strike actions on the public universities students in Nigeria.

Ogunode (2020) is poor funding of higher education. Okoli, Ogbondah & Ewor (2016) identified poor implementation of agreement reached with the unions while Ogunode, Jegede & Musa (2021) pointed out to the poor working condition Ogunode, Olugbenga, & Ezema, (2022); Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Iroegbu, (2022); Ogunode, & Adanna, (2022) and lack of infrastructural facilities in the various higher institutions.

There are many challenges effects of strike actions on the Nigerian higher institution. Some of the challenges effects of strike actions on the Nigerian higher institution include; unstable academic programme (Lawan & Ogunode 2021), reduction in quality of education (Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, 2016), responsible foreign education Ogunode, Ahmed , Abubakar, (2020); Ogunode, & Ahaotu (2020); Ogunode, Jegede, (2021), capital flight, learning of foreign culture (Ogunode, Josiah & Ajape(2021); Ogunode & Onyekachi, 2021);Ogunode,& Oluseun, 2020), brain-drain Ogunode, & Atobauka, (2021a); Ogunode, Jegede & Musa (2021); Ogunode, Okwelogu, Enyinnaya, &Yahaya (2021); Ogunode, Akinlade & Abubaka (2021), social vices among students and resources/educational wastage.

### **Concept of Students**

The students are crucial members of the university community. The university is centered on the students. The Students are strong members of the university system. Students are the main reason behind the creation of tertiary institutions (Ogunode & Musa 2021). Educational institutions are established to equip students with skills necessary to direct the affairs of man's society in the nearest future (Ogunode & Musa 2021). Enueme, &Onyene (2010) and (Ogunode & Musa 2021) submits that the development of any nations largely depends on youths while Omonijo, Nnedum, Fadugba, Uche , Makodi (2013) and (Ogunode & Musa 2021) observed that "young students are leaders of tomorrow". Therefore, when attentions are not properly given to students in the course of studentship, the society could be at a risk of competent future leaders. Yusuf (2017) and (Ogunode & Musa 2021) opined that all higher education stakeholders must promote independent, self-directed students' behaviour, and do that in a community context. Worthy citizenship and service to the community are important values to promote during the higher education experience. The delivery of students' services and programmes is based on a number of critical values including worth of the individual, diversity, pluralism, inclusiveness, community, high expectations, a global view, citizenship and leadership, ethical living, and the idea that students can and must participate actively in their growth and development.

Strike actions by Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, SSANU, and Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions, NASU and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) in the Nigerian public universities are affecting the students which include by undergraduate and post-graduate students. These constant disruptions of academic activities in the nation's public universities come with serious impacts on the students, many of whom have been expressing their frustration on the painful inability of the federal government and the academic union to resolve their crises (Dailytrust,2022).

### **Concept of Strike**

A strike is commonly, according to Archie (undated), considered the last weapon in the armory of organized labour for settling industrial disputes. When all other options for amicable settlement of an industrial dispute have exhausted and negotiations with the employer have failed, the workmen resort to strike action. The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, defined a strike as —a cessation of work by a body of persons employed in any industry acting in combination, or a concerted refusal, or a refusal under common understanding of any number of persons who are or have been so employed to continue to work or to accept employment. Archie (undated) observed that Strike is today regarded as a legitimate weapon for the workmen for the purpose of projecting their demands. If an employer denies or refuses to give his workmen some benefits to which they are entitled, the law gives the concerned employees a weapon to force the employers to accede to their demands. According to Archie (undated) the weapon is stoppage of work, which popularly known as strike.

Strikes are important not only from industrial point of view but also from social and economic points of view as well as they leave an impact on the society as they do on labour and employees. The word strike is an artificial character and does not represent any legal definition or description. It is an agreement between persons who are working for a particular employer, not to continue working for him. It is simultaneous cessation of work by labour or workers temporarily in order to express grievance or to enforce a demand concerning changes in work condition (Archie undated).

Strike action is a work stoppage in an organization, caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. A strike usually takes place in response to employee grievances and unfilled demand. "Strike means concerted action of group of people resulting in a cessation of work, a refusal to work or to continue to work by employees, or a slow-down or other concerted activity of employees that is designed to or does limit production or services, but does not include an act or omission required for the

safety or health of employees. The strike is labour's strongest weapon against the employer and is the counter weapon of the LOCK OUT. Strike may be of various types — namely general strike, stay in sit down, tools down strike, pen down strike, hunger strike, sympathetic strike. The essential elements of a strike are as follows according to Archie (undated):

- (i) The strike involves a combined and concerted withdrawal of services by workers.
- (ii) The cessation of work is for a temporary period. The strike does not imply termination of an employer-employees relationship. Strikers know that they will resume work after the strike ends.
- (iii) The strike is resorted to for achieving certain objectives. The main objective is furthering and protecting the workers' rights and interests, particularly for fulfilling specific demands for the benefits of workers.

### **Impact of Strike actions on Students of Public Universities in Nigeria**

In this paper the following; prolonged graduation, academic performance, social vices, learning lose, unstable learning programme, increment in learning cost, foreign education, mental health challenges, **waning interest in educational system waste of accommodation rent** would be considered as the impact of strike actions on the public universities students in Nigeria.

#### **Prolonged graduation**

The strike actions in the public universities in Nigeria have prevented many students from graduating when they are supposed to graduate. Many students are stationed in the same level for a long time because of strike actions in the system. Musa (2019) argued that strikes in the Nigerian public universities has prolonged the graduation of many students. Many students in the Nigerian universities only knew when they are admitted but never known when they would graduate from the school due to strikes actions. Dailytrust (2022) These constant disruptions of academic activities in the nation's public universities come with serious impacts on the students, many of whom have been expressing their frustration on the painful inability of the federal government and the academic union to resolve their crises.

#### **Academic Performance**

The incessant strike actions in the Nigerian universities has affected the academic performance of students in various programme in the universities. Many students have dropped academically because of the continuous strike actions in the universities. The strike actions has cause them to maintain a steady academic performance. A study by Christian (2015) that examined the influence of strike action on the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions with particular reference to Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri, Imo State and the result showed that strike *actions* highly influence the academic performance of students in tertiary institution. Omotere (2014) also submitted that strike actions in the universities *affect* the performance of students. Odim, Annastashia & Solomon and Amadi and Urho, (2015), *opined that* most academic activities for school year are distorted. This is one of major *causes* of producing unqualified *graduates* who are deficient in their fields of study. In the same vein, students who are supposed to do a four year course end up spending six years in the school. Such strike periods also have the tendency of leading undergraduates into some social vices like prostitution, oil bunkering etc. A study by Christian (2015), which examined the influence of strike actions on the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions, with particular reference to Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri, Imo State. The population of the study was the 635 academic staff in five schools in the college. A sample of 128 representing 20% of the population was taken. The study adopted a descriptive survey design while the instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire. The Likert four point, scale rating was adopted whereas the data collected were analyzed using mean. The results of the data analyses showed that strike action highly influence the academic performance of students in tertiary institution. Poor remuneration, negligence by government, unhelpful academic environment among others were identified as major causes of strike action.

#### **Social Vices**

The strike actions in the Nigerian universities has pushed many students into different social vices like criminal activities, Banditry, Kidnapping, drugs, drunkenness and prostitutions. Lawan & Ogunode (2021); Ogunode Akinjobi & Musa (2022); Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Jegede (2022) opined that the Nigerian higher institutions are known for various strike actions embarked upon by different union groups as a result of failure by the government to implement some agreement signed to be implemented by the government. These strike actions have negative impact on the students. Nigerian students at the higher institutions do not even know when to graduate because of the continuous strike action by the union groups. The result of strike action on the educational institutions is disruption in academic programme becomes a natural consequence of each industrial action or strike. Hence, normal teaching and learning are stalled and therefore, most students are prone to diverse activities such as sexual immorality, cyber scam, pool betting, watching of movies, and engaging in unnecessary gossip etc, rather than reading their books and soon, they forget about academic and lose interest and focus of educational demands which in long run affects their learning capability (Modishproproject, 2016).

#### **Learning Loss**

The strike actions in the public universities in Nigeria has led to learning loss. Many students have lost learning hours in their universities because of strike actions by Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, SSANU, and Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions, NASU and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT). Leadership (2022) disclosed that the lecturers' union's ongoing

strike is the 16th since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, shutting down academic activities in public universities for a cumulative period of more than four years within 23 years, a duration that is sufficient to complete a four-year degree programme, with some strikes lasting few weeks and others for several months. Okoli, Ogbondah & Ewor, (2016) submitted that it has become a known fact that students across various universities in Nigeria are constantly faced with industrial actions embarked upon by the Academic and Non-Academic Staff Unions of various institutions. The disagreement or lack of understanding between government and unions arising from non-implementation of agreement reached, often results in deadlock that usually disrupts academic calendar. As academic activities are suspended for a long period, the students reading abilities fell. Even the previous knowledge acquired is even forgotten by some students. This mostly turns some students into certificate seekers than knowledge seekers (Ogunode, Akin-Ibidiran & Ibidiran (2022) ;Ogunode & Ndubuisi, Jeged (2022). Dailytrust (2022) Usually when the strike is called off, the management of various universities "rush" students to quickly cover the remaining academic workload to end the semester. This has therefore, in many ways affected the students' chances of learning well and without the stress of having to quickly prepare for C.A. tests, exam, etc. Godwin Jackson, a final year law student at the University of Abuja recalled how after the 9-month ASUU strike in 2020, students had to quickly cover up the curriculum and start exam in just five weeks. "After that 2020 strike, when we resumed, our lecturers rushed us to cover the remaining lectures and do exam. It was really tough and stressful having to read for two or three tests in the night every day," he lamented.

### **Unstable Learning Programme**

The learning programme designed by the various universities for their students and the students individual learning programme are always be disrupted by the strike actions of the unions in the universities. The learning programme which include coming to classes for lecturers, writing your assignment, project work and excursion programme. All these programmes are suspended during the strike actions in the public universities. Romina (2013) stated that the universities in Nigeria are presently closed down since July 2 2013 as a result of failure of the federal government to implement the agreement reached with the academic staff union of universities since 2009, despite all assurances and memorandum of understanding between the two parties. The disruption of academic programmes of institutions of higher learning affects students learning outcomes, since lecturers find it difficult to complete the course work. The frequent disputes and strike galore by university staff and students leave students with little or no time to complete both their theoretical and practical work. In most cases a semester's course work is sandwiched to few weeks during which lectures are rushed to accommodate the time lost to strike. This type of academic rush is a big threat to attainment of quality in higher education in Nigeria. Nigerian higher institutions have lost many students to foreign education because of various internal crisis within the system.

### **Increment in Learning Expenditure**

The incessant strike actions in the public universities in Nigeria has increased the learning expenditures of parents and students who are sponsoring their education by themselves. The strike actions increase additional cost on students and parents every time the unions embarks on strikes. Musa (2019) lamented that many students have to spend a lot before completing their four years programme in the Nigerian universities. Lawan & Ogunode (2021) stated that incessant strikes dwindle the academic performance of students. As learning is suspended for a long period, the students reading abilities fall. Even the knowledge acquired during the learning period is even forgotten by some students. This mostly turns some students into certificate seekers than knowledge seeker. Students spend more in the during any strike actions. They spend more to travel home and come back when the strike actions are over. The schools also spend more on provide social capital. The strike actions are responsible for educational waste. Educational waste also occurred when time resources are waste on the strike actions. The after-effect is prolonged school year that exceeds stipulated periods. Most academic activities for the school year are distorted. This is one major cause of producing unqualified graduates who are deficient in their fields of study. In the same vein, students who are supposed to do a four year course end up spending six years in the school for a simple programme.

### **Foreign Education and brain drain**

The continuous strike actions in the public universities in Nigeria have led to many Nigerian students seeking foreign university education. Many young Nigeria because of the instability in the university system have opt for foreign higher education, which as a result have led to brain drain. During this current strike action, many are nor seeking alternative higher education abroad. Olowonefa, Ogunode, & Ohibime (2022) and Lawan & Ogunode (2021) submits that strike actions in the Nigerian higher institutions by different union groups are also responsible for many young Nigerian travelling to other countries for foreign education. A research by Bola (2013) revealed that 74% Nigerian international student indicated strike actions/ unstable academic programme as the reasons they opt for foreign education. The continuous strike actions in the Nigerian higher institutions are also responsible for foreign education. Many Nigerian students schooling in different part of the world identified the continuous actions of by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) is responsible for their oversea education. Findings by Vanguard (2022) showed that the country loses billions of dollars yearly to other nations in school fees. Nigerian students are found mainly in universties in the United Kingdom, the US, South Africa, Ghana, Ukraine, Australia, Russia among others. According to the Institute of International Education in the US, Nigerian students spent about \$514 million (about N2.5 trillion) on school fees in the country in 2021. Also, the about 19,000 Nigerian students in neighbouring Ghana spent about N250 billion on school fees last year. Ghanaian student pays an average of \$276 as fees,

while a Nigerian student there pays an average of \$4,647. Only recently, the Central Bank of Nigeria came out to say that between 2010 and 2020, the country expended the sum of \$28.66 billion on the payment of fees by Nigerian students studying abroad. That is an average of \$2.86 billion a year.

### **Mental Health Challenges**

The strike actions has affected the health of many students. Daily trust (2022) report that many students have complained that while universities are on strike, they mostly remain bored and idle at home, while waiting for when schools will reopen. Such boredom and idleness can sometimes lead to mental health challenges which include depression and anxiety, thus taking tolls on the students' mental health. Daily trust (2022) quoted Abdullahi Ibrahim Jalo, a 500-level student of Pharmacy at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, who submitted that about his experience and said the strike has affected his mental health in some ways, particularly by inducing anxiety of whether the academic activities will resume or not, and when. He said, "There has been that anxiety of when we are going to resume, if we are even going to resume, because I want to graduate in time to be able to apply for jobs that come with age limits. Many other life plans such as marriage, keep getting disrupted."

### **Waning Interest in Educational System**

The strike actions by Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, SSANU, and Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions, NASU and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) has the potential to discourage students from schooling. The strike actions by different union groups is making education no longer interesting for the youth. Daily trust (2022) observed with the many ways the constant strikes delay and frustrate students, some students have resorted to looking for opportunities to earn stipends. This situation makes education less interesting and sets them in a tight corner when classes resume from the industrial action. Maigari was quoted by Daily trust when he said, "We Nigerian students don't actually care about education anymore, because already, the government has convinced us that education is useless."

### **Waste of Accommodation Rent**

Many public universities students have left the rented apartment waste because they are not in school. Many Nigerian universities depend private facilities for accommodation in their institutions because of inadequate hostels facilities. Many of these students paid huge sum of money to rent these apartment outside the campus. Daily trust (2022) report that another serious effect of the strike is that many students who stay off-campus end up burning their rent since they can't stay in the rented apartments during the shutdown. A final year student of International Relations in ABU Zaria, Muhammad Maina, told Daily Trust that he fears the N180,000 he paid for his accommodation would waste before schools resume. "This strike has been affecting me seriously, especially mentally. In fact I have paid N180,000 for my accommodation, so now if it persists I would end up having to repay," he said.

### **Conclusion**

This paper discussed the impact of strike actions the students of public universities in Nigeria and the paper concludes prolonged graduation, academic performance, social vices, learning lose, unstable learning programme, increment in learning cost, foreign education, mental health challenges, **waning interest in educational system waste of accommodation rent** are the impact of strike actions on the public universities students in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

To solve these problems, this paper *suggests* the following:

- a) The government should increase the funding of higher institutions in the country. This will help to meet up with the infrastructural development of the higher institutions.
- b) The government should ensure that all agreement signed and reached with different trade unions in the higher institutions are implemented as agreed. This will help to prevent strikes action in the higher institutions.
- c) The government should be proactive to negotiate with the trade unions in the higher institutions before they embark on any strike. Most protracted strikes can be averted if necessary steps are taken to build a good relationship between both parties.

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