

THE IMPLICATIONS OF INCESSANT ASUU STRIKES ON NIGERIA'S EDUCATION, ECONOMY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The paper assessed the genesis and the menace of incessant ASUU strikes and its implication on Nigeria's education which is believed to be bedeviling Nigeria's education progress and development. It briefly provided an overview of the incessant ASUU strikes. Also, the effects caused by these incessant strikes on Nigeria's economy were examined in the paper. The paper studied the concept of national development which was referred to as holistic approach that includes all aspects of life of an individual and the nation such as full-growth and expansion of industries, agriculture, education, social, religious and cultural institutions. It also examined the effects caused by these incessant strikes on national development. Furthermore, way forward was discussed in the paper. Conclusively, recommendations were made on how to appropriately address the incessant ASUU strikes which among others includes provision of adequate fund by the allocation of 26% of annual budget to education sector as recommended by UNESCO.

Keywords: ASUU Strikes, Economy, National Development

Introduction

Indisputably, education is wealth and an educated nation is a wealthy nation. A responsible government must prioritize the development of the education sector and ensure that its citizens acquire quality education. These will fast track rapid development, economic growth and technological advancement. Regrettably, public universities have assumed solitary status due to the incessant strike by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Nigerian education system keeps frustrating students' ambitions and aspirations with the frequent culture of disruptions to the process of acquiring knowledge.

Recently, ASUU spent almost eight months on strike in an attempt to ensure the compliance and implementation of Federal Government-ASUU bilateral agreements. This is one of the many strikes observed by ASUU since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The Federal Government and ASUU have been at loggerheads over the failure of the former to fulfill some of the agreements it made as far back as 2009. The pertinent demands from the unmet agreements are the allocation of at least 26% of Nigeria's annual budget to the education sector as recommended by UNESCO, the 2009 Agreement that emphasized

the funding for revitalization of public universities, addressing the inconsistencies in the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System Payment (IPPIS), etc.

Brief Overview of ASUU Strike

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is a Nigerian union of University academic staff formed in 1978. The Academic Staff Union of Universities was formed in 1978, a successor to the Nigerian Association of University Teachers formed in 1965 and covering academic staff in all of the Federal and State universities in the country. After the return to democracy in 1999 with the Nigerian fourth republic, the Union continued to be militant in demanding the rights of University workers against opposition by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. In July 2002, Dr. Oladipo Fashina, the then national president of the Union, petitioned Justice Mustapha Akandi of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to investigate the authorities of the University of Ilorin for financial mismanagement and corruption. In 2007, ASUU went on strike for three months. In May 2008, it held two one-week "warning strike" to press a range of demands,

including an improved salary scheme and reinstatement of 49 lecturers who were dismissed many years earlier. In June 2009, ASUU ordered its members in Federal and State universities nationwide to proceed on an indefinite strike over disagreements with the Federal Government on an agreement it reached with the Union about two and a half years earlier. The strikes called by ASUU in 2010, 2011 and 2013 were due to the inability of the federal government to address the issue of University funding. ASUU also went on another strike in 2017, and it was still due to poor funding of the Nigerian universities. On March 23rd 2020, ASUU went on a nationwide strike. The lecturers vow not to resume until their demands are met by the federal government. One of the major reasons for the strike is because of the "IPPIS issue." The most recent strike by ASUU was that of February 14th, 2022 to October 17th, 2022. It is the longest ASUU strike in Nigerian History that lasted for 8 months. It started on February 14th, 2022 and ended on October 17th, 2022 after a court intervention (Opera News, 2021).

The Concept of National Economy

National economy is the economy of a nation as a whole that is an economic unit and is usually held to have a unique existence greater than the sum of the individual units within it. The national economy of a country is, in fact, based on small and medium industries. These are the fundamentals, the foundations of all national economies. A national economy is the production, distribution and trade, consumption of goods and services by different agents of a nation. The national economy in a global context is primarily about macroeconomics. But microeconomic principles do influence the behavior of the macro economy. The main functions of a national economy are related to the production and consumption of goods and services. A national economy has goals and characteristics that allow it to function properly. However, these may be different from nation to nation. Every country wants its economy to be successful. As opined by Tolu and Abe (2011), each nation has different goals that will ensure the success and stability of its national economy. Some goals an economy might have are: efficiency, equity, economic freedom, economic growth, full employment, price stability, etc.

The Concept of National Development

The term national development is very comprehensive. It includes all aspects of the life of an individual and the nation. It is holistic in approach. It is a process of reconstruction and development in various dimensions of a nation and development of individuals. It includes full-growth and expansion of our industries, agriculture, education, social, religious and cultural institutions. Moreover, national development implies development of a nation as a whole. It can be best defined as the all-round and balanced development of different aspects and facets of the nation viz. political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and material.

National development has been defined as the overall influence of all human forces and the increase to the inventory of physical, human capital, knowledge, and skill (Vaisey, 1975). United Nations Decade Report has defined it as "a growth plus change, change in turn of social and cultural as well as economic and qualitative as well as quantitative." It has been defined as the general improvement of a nation to raise the standard of living for a population. It is essential if a country is to develop economically, socially or environmentally. The concept encompasses a lot of ground. It encompasses all facets of an individual's life as well as the life of a nation. It takes all-inclusive approach to the problem. It is a process that involves reconstruction and development of numerous aspects of a nation as well as the development of individuals. In addition to this, the term refers to the improvement of an entire nation. It also refers to the improvement of a country in all areas, including the political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, and material spheres.

National development encompasses the whole growth as well as the expansion of all institutions; it also incorporates agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The capacity of a nation to enhance its citizens' standard of living is an indicator of the nation's level of development. It is possible to accomplish this by offering them the essential components of a means of subsistence, such as employment opportunities, equal status, etc. A rise in people's median income is a result of economic expansion. Literacy, health, and the expansion of publicly provided services are all components of social progress. Broadly, United Nations Decade Report enumerated and

encapsulates the following parameters for national development:

- Improvement of conditions in rural areas
- Increase in agricultural production through application of modern technical know-how
- Broadening the understanding of economics
- Managing population increase in highly populated areas
- Elimination of all forms of poverty
- Harnessing industrial production
- Development of human resource
- Application of science and technology in production sector,
- Provision of mass education and
- Provision of various facilities to meet the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged, deprived and poorest of the poor segments of population.

Implication of Incessant ASUU Strike on Nigeria's Education System

There is no doubt that previous ASUU strikes have been known for battering and shattering academic calendars in great measures. The persistent strikes come to a large extent of battering the academic calendar. These disruptions in academic programs goes a long in elongating academic calendars thereby accumulating more days, months and even years to students' programs. The universities' academic calendar has been greatly disrupted by ASUU strikes right from the military regime down to this civilian regime. The situation is gradually degenerating from bad to worse. This disruption of academic calendar is one of the major causes of educational backwardness in Nigeria. Aside from battering academic calendar, it also serves as non-motivational factor to students and it discourages them from learning (Sani Usman, 2022). Several researches have shown that incessant strikes diminish the academic performances of students (Rasheedat, 2022). As learning is suspended for a long period, students' reading and learning motivation decreased. Even the knowledge and skills acquired during the learning period is even forgotten by some students. In the long run, they soon forget about academics and are no longer prepared for class activities which negatively affect their learning capability. This mostly turns some students into certificate seekers rather than knowledge and skills seekers.

This menace is closely related to the above, which is engagement of the idle students in social vices including joining bad gangs of cyber scam and crimes such as Yahoo-Yahoo, internet frauds, armed robbery, kidnapping, sexual immorality, prostitution, political thuggery, etc. Many cases of pregnancy of young undergraduates during the period of strike have used to occur. It is not surprising therefore that during strike actions, some students are seen involved in diverse activities such as pool betting, unnecessary gossips, watching of films and reading comic materials for entertainment purposes rather than facing their studies and reading their books, etc. The simultaneous strike actions are making students losing faith in the educational system of the country entirely. This is because a four-year degree course has been unofficially increased to five years or even more. Globally, there is the usual sneer when Nigerian universities are mentioned and a quick link with unstable university calendar due to frequent strikes. This image robs graduates of our universities of international esteem even when their worth has not been proven through employment.

In terms of condensation of the school's syllabus, the strike is negatively affecting Nigeria's universities. The strikes scenarios are condensing or compressing courses and programs that should have been taught for the period of the strike to about a fifth of the expected period. The negative effect of these condensed courses and topics to the academic empowerment of students' learning effectiveness can better be imagined than described. The strike actions usually pose a lot of negative effects on the students' academic performance. This is because the period that should have been used to teach the students is spent at home, all in the name of strike.

Implication of Incessant ASUU Strikes on Nigeria's Economy

Incessant ASUU strikes negatively affect Nigeria's economy in several ways. In this case, the primary stakeholders are the students, lecturers, proprietors of campus businesses, and the country in general. The ultimate losers are the students. Some would-be students are also not able to take up their admissions either due to loss of interest or inability to meet the stipulated deadlines. Moreover, given that majority of the universities are non-residential, many of th

students are forced to forfeit monies paid to their landlords for accommodation prior to the strikes. Majority of the students are made to spend additional years in school than is necessary, as a result of which they may no longer be found worthy for employment due to the 30 years' age limit. Strike-related delays in schooling years pose a threat to Nigerian youths' employment prospects because they must overcome age restrictions to work in several industries, such as banks, security personnel, etc. While their peers who attended private institutions graduated on time, served in the National Youth Service, and now hold well-paying jobs in respected companies, they run the risk of not doing so because of age restrictions.

Perhaps, among the worst of these effects is that several of the students resort to crime including cultism, ritual killing, advance fee fraud (419) and internet fraud (Yahoo-Yahoo) during these strikes. These, they end up bringing into the university, when the strike eventually ends. Yet another group that is severely hit by the incessant strikes are the Lecturers. Of course, many of them abandon their jobs and relocate abroad for greener pastures, resulting in brain drain. Because Nigeria's universities are unstable, hardly operate any defined academic calendar, and do not pay well, lecturers from outside our climes are usually not attracted to work in our universities even as most of them prefer to go to the neighboring countries. Furthermore, many lecturers are forced to forfeit their annual vacation due to these strikes given that the ongoing session had not been concluded, and this negatively impacts on their state of health. Moreover, families of some of these lecturers are forced to go through severe hardship considering that the salaries of their benefactors have been withheld due to the strike. This, in some cases, also results in the demise of these lecturers. Even more worrisome is the fact that some of them are forced to engage in very demeaning jobs during these strikes in a bid to survive, while several others accumulate debts that they hope to settle at the end of the strike, when their salary is restored. Periods of strike in our Universities are also not the best of times for proprietors of the several businesses on campus. Majority of these businesses are forced to close down owing to lack of patronage. These include operators of small shops, campus car and bus shuttle, etc. Their plight is better imagined, considering the level of loss and damage they incur especially in a place like

Nigeria where many have to borrow, with exorbitant rates of interest to set up such businesses. To think that most of these people also have families that depend on them is to add salt to injury.

By far the greatest loser during these strikes is Nigeria. Of course, it negatively affects the rating of the country's universities. Unfortunately, poor quality universities in neighboring countries have become the greatest beneficiaries as several Nigerian students migrate to these countries to study. The country also loses in so many ways. For instance, it is impossible for anybody to presently collect either a certificate or transcript from any of the public universities due to the ongoing strike. Considering that the world has now become a global village, imagine the number of employers of labour and foreign universities that would be unable to confirm the certificates presented to them by Nigerians. Because of the nature of these strikes and the damage they usually do to the university calendar, each university at the end of such strikes comes out with imaginative ways to correct its Calendar and this includes shortening the periods of learning. Below, are some other economic impacts of the ASUU strike. It causes weakened labour force as some students even lose the knowledge they acquired. Due to this, some students start pursuing certificates rather than knowledge, which lowers productivity and creates pupils of worse caliber. Another impact is waste of funds on education; the continuous strike can lead the state and federal governments to lose billions of dollars in revenue from paying academics for services not provided after the strike and the cost of maintaining university-owned utilities like cars and generators during a protracted strike by university lecturers. Among these menace are increased financial burden on families. Strikes make things more difficult for parents and students because resources bought for the semester will be wasted while they are on strike. After a strike, parents will have to hustle for funds to buy school items once again. Students whose parents are unable to pay for such necessities during resumption suffer throughout the remainder of the semester. The challenge rests squarely on the government given that for now it is the greatest employer of labour in our economy.

Implication of Incessant ASUU Strike on National Development

Despite the poor research and innovation capabilities of our universities, incessant strike is jeopardizing the little research they are undertaking. The kind of research and development activities that can put Nigeria in the league of developed nation cannot take place in a disruptive environment like the one we are currently witnessing in our universities. It is therefore clear that the recurrent ASUU strike will have negative effect on universities' Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), lecturers' and university communities' income and this will make some business owners to be bankrupt (Vanguard Newspaper, August, 2022). Other problems caused by incessant ASUU strikes to national development are increase in the scale of unemployment and under-employment due to the fact that employers will not be able to employ outgoing students since they have not been graduated and certificated. The idle students that ventured into social vices like cyber scam and crimes, Yahoo-Yahoo, internet frauds, armed robbery, kidnapping, political thuggery, etc., will impact negative effect on national development. Rise of phenomenon of brain-drain due to job uncertainty. Professionals most especially, lecturers, medical doctors and others abandon their jobs and relocate abroad for stable and greener pastures. Also, due to these incessant strike actions which culminate into instability in Nigeria's universities and poor payment, professional lecturers from foreign countries are no longer attracted to work in the country (Tribune Online Newspaper, April, 2022). So, these are indicators that will push some huge number of Nigerians to wallow in poverty, unemployment and uncertainty. This will also greatly affect the nation's quest to improve the life quality of her citizens in order to successfully enhance meaningful development. Graduates produced may not compete favorably with those from sane academic climes at global pedestal. Half-baked graduates that are unemployable will obviously pervade the labour market hence counterproductive for a nation with parlous economy.

The Way Forward

First and foremost, Federal Government must realize that its vision of taking Nigeria into the

league of 20 largest economies in the world cannot be realistic without the simultaneous empowering of our education sector, and it is a fundamental for boosting Nigeria's growth and development. Since the Federal Government is giving itself a target of putting Nigeria in the league of 20 largest economies, it should also give itself the target of putting the best of Nigerian universities into the league of top 100 universities in the world. This however, will not be realistic without both ASUU and Federal Government coming to the understanding that they both have a stake in this endeavor.

It is a shame that despite the return to democracy in 1999, Nigerian government cannot move up its budgetary allocation to the education sector beyond the range of 14%, when some West African countries such as Ghana are allocating more than 20% of their annual budget to education sector. The series of parley between government and ASUU should be used to reach lasting solution on the issue. Going forward, the government should show sincerity of purpose to meet agreed bilateral agreement. As a step in the right direction, Government should pay the backlog of six months' salaries owed the lecturers while negotiation continues. ASUU on their part should devise new possible strategies to put an end to the menace. The peculiarities of the university system such as sabbatical leave, employing visiting lecturers, part timers, and other practices necessary should be internationalized so as to make our universities world-class.

There is no doubt that the major contention to this dispute is funding, Federal Government in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations, donors, business community, foundations and remaining stakeholders should provide extra ways of unearthing enough funds and grants to meet its obligations. Declaration of providing and allocating 26% of annual budget to education sector by UNESCO should be adopted. The problems and issues of brain drain in university system should also be squarely addressed by reviewing salary and allowance payments based on world standard. Proliferation of new public, and private and state universities should be properly addressed; strict requirements should be put in place for any tier of government to fulfill if it so wishes to open a university. A database for academic staff should be established in order to control academics from taking

numerous visiting appointments at a particular time for quality control and excellence.

Conclusion

Conclusively, ASUU and Federal Government should recognize that education of its citizens is paramount premises in the formulations and implementation of positive social and developmental policies. Therefore, there is need for re-evaluation of the education sector in terms of adequate provision of funds and grants. Consequently, education sector should be properly and adequately funded to encourage effective research, highly intelligent and skillful graduates that will be employable into the nation's economic, agricultural, manufacturing sectors.

Recommendations

To properly address the incessant ASUU strike and its implication on Nigeria's education, economy and national development, the paper provides the following recommendations:

- Allocation of 26% of annual budget to education sector as recommended by UNESCO should be properly adopted.
- Federal and state governments in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations, donors, business community, foundations and remaining stakeholder should provide extra ways of unearthing enough funds and grants to education sector.
- All stakeholders should also support the public universities in the area of infrastructural development such as the provision of adequate world-class lecture halls and theatres, offices, hostels, functional laboratories, libraries, good road network, regular power supply, potable water, modern internet facilities and services,
- Government should sincerely meet agreed bilateral agreement on revitalization fund, settling the backlog and regular payment of earned allowances.
- The peculiarities of the university system such as salaries and allowances, sabbatical leave, employing visiting lecturers, part timers, and other practices necessary should be internationalized so as to make the universities world-class.

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