

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT PLANNERS' VIEW OF STRIKE ACTION AND ITS EFFECTS ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

Here is an educational management planners' view of strike actions and its effects on educational management of Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria-Africa. This work takes on strike actions in Nigeria; causes of strike actions; effects of strike actions on educational management; effects of ASUU strike actions on the students, and zeros in on eradication of strike actions in tertiary institutions. An attempt at summarizing the view has been made.

Introduction: It is an established fact that the vision of Universities is to be pace-setting institutions in terms of learning, character building and service to mankind with a mission to produce competent and resourceful graduates with high moral standards in our society, and the total development of men and women in an enabling environment through appropriate teaching, research and service to humanity, influenced by the constitutional ethics and culture of our Nigerian state. 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.

Education is a necessity for survival of man, it suggests development of valuable knowledge and skills in a society, it brings about in the persons submitted to it certain skills and attitudes that are adjudged to be useful and designable in the society. As a result of the necessity of education, there has been the view that one who ceases to learn ceases to exist although the one may be living, to "exist" is more than to "live" because it means being in the world and at the same time with the world. Thus, one who exists has attributes of transcending, discerning, communicating and participating with others who are existing but one who is living does not possess these critical attributes. One, whose development of knowledge ceases has also stopped to exist, is merely living.

It may be that the problem with education in Nigeria is policy summersault. Leaders start a policy before thinking through the workability of the policy. The National Assembly should affect the enabling law". In Nigeria, despite the fact that in the National policy on Education

(NPE, 1998) a well deserved chapter is assigned to Adult and non-formal Education, yet this sector has not been fairly treated in practice. This justified Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie's position on September (19, 2011) that "the Federal Government reportedly reached an agreement in 2009 with the Academic Union and sadly, two years after signing the agreement, many aspects of it are yet to be implemented". This position called for a re-orientation in this age of our existence as a nation. There must be a coordinated development of financial incentives for universities to deliver on education, and the drafting of adequate plan of funding mechanisms in an accountable and transparent manner such that this increased funding achieves its intended purpose.

According to Oluwafemi (2010) while thanking the Ondo State Governor, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko for his tremendous support, the V.C explained that "the capital vote for the university this year is more than the institution has received in the past 10 years, expressing determination to make judicious use of the resources". Mimiko also mentioned that provision of permanent health centre, internet resources center, 500 capacity lecture theatre, two stand-alone toilet facilities with WCs, senate building, among other are in the pipe line.

In the same view of meeting up standard in the universities, the senate president National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS), Comrade Agbabiska Ahmed stated that "we have observed with contempt, the despicable manipulation of the National Association of Nigeria Students. One way this has occurred is in the mobilization of some students to champion the cause of a person or groups under the aegis of NANS for selfish political reasons". He further said that "in some cases, hoodlums and non students are made to wear identity cards of NANS members to perpetrate acts of division which soils the image of the association. The senate of NANS condemns this act with vigor".

It has been argued why dialogue is no longer effective in resolving common conflicts between the Academic Staff Unions and the government. According to the Voice of the Nigeria Tertiary Institutions (VNTI) news of 13th August 2012, the Rivers State University of Science and Technology went on indefinite strike action over the imposition of a new Vice Chancellor by the state government. It was reported that Prof. Barineme Bekee Fakae lost in the criteria and followed not the due process and yet for political reasons, the state governor imposed him on the University as Vice Chancellor. It recalled that in 2009 the University embarked on such strike action over the imposition of the same reported Vice Chancellor on the institution.

The Finance Minister, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iwuala had announced that "the president has made available ₦100 billion a year in the first instance to repair hostels, laboratories and classrooms and other facilities in the Universities, and an offer of ₦ 30 billion has also been made to ASUU towards the earned allowances of its members. But according to the National president of ASUU, Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie, the Guardian, Tuesday August 11, 2009. "Blamed the strike partly on the federal government's refusal to sign the agreement after two years of negotiations and its inability to commence the re-negotiation of the ASUU agreement of 2001 which was due in 2004 until December 2006.

The chairman of the re-negotiating committee of Federal Government of Nigeria and Academic Staff Union of Universities (FGN/ASUU, Mr. Gamaliel Onosode in the Guardian Tuesday August 11, 2009 said the federal government was pulling out of the re-negotiating team, that the decision was taken following ASUU's refusal to suspend the strike, that since all government's efforts to facilitate the conclusion of the negotiation had failed and further actions were being stalled by the strike, the federal government had no other option than to pull out".

Strike Actions in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions: Attention and concern has been paid to various sectors of education in recent times due to incessant cases of sporadic disagreement between

labour and management. Strike actions take various forms in tertiary institutions and are seen as an aspect of worker unrest no matter their level which in various instances is disruptive.

According to Ootobo (2005), the general effect or impacts of strikes and lockout on workers and management, (private and public) may be usefully examined at three levels, all of which would be affected by actual conduct situation, duration of conflict, and the agreement, duration of conflict and the agreement reached. These three levels are the social – psychological, political and economic effect.

Strike is an aspect of industrial conflict used by workers to express their grievances. It is a collective, organized, cessation or slowdown of work by employees, to force acceptance of their demands by the employers.

According to Igbaji (2009), in an industrial relation system, conflicts (strikes) arise between workers and managers chiefly because of their different ideologies and opposing interests. Students across various institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are constantly faced with industrial actions either by the Academic or Non-Academic Staff (Admin 2012), the disagreement or lack of understanding between government and academic community often result in deadlock that usually disrupt academic calendar.

According to Kagbaranen (2012), any government that does not encourage education of its youth is directly compromising the future of the nation. He also said that such government is not worth living. The quality of education offered by higher educational institutions in Nigeria in recent times has deteriorated substantially (Mohammed & Gbenu 2007). Strike has been prominent in relations vocabulary due to the fact that strikes are permanent and ineradicable, not outbreaks of discontent caused by obvious grievances which could have been avoided.

It must be noted that since 2009, the Federal Government has not implemented the agreement reached with ASUU. Students and lecturers decried that continuous outbreak of strikes in Nigerian tertiary institutions have undermined university education greatly leading to the deterioration of values and moral standards, (Oluwole & Olubanji (2009).

(Ootobo 2005) also stated that strike is a typical result from the failure of negotiation to arrive at agreed-upon terms and as a bargaining weapon. It is the only ultimate level available for use by industrial unions. So from the foregoing, strikes are accumulated actions due largely to negotiations that have failed in the past to which reference could be made through employees may seem to forego the term of reference. University workers like all other industrial workers use strike for similar reasons. Between 1992 and 1995, the crises in Nigeria's tertiary institutions took a turn for the worse.

According to Adeyemi (2006-2010), "The main aim of higher education in Nigeria is to give very sound and qualitative education which will enable the individual to function effectively in any environment in which he finds himself. According to Mgagula (2007) the general mandate of tertiary institutions is to generate knowledge and information through teaching and community service. Magagula argues that the basic functions of tertiary institutions are to teach student and other knowledge.

Causes of Strike Actions in Tertiary Institutions: Various policy makers, administrators, scholars and researchers have pointed accusing fingers at several factors as responsible for strike actions in places of work and in the education industry in particular. Strike actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria have had serious effects on the academic performance of students. Founded in 1978, the Union organized nationwide strike to challenge the military regimes of General Muhammed Buhari and General Sani Abacha,

and Ibrahim Babagida. The Union has also used strike actions to demand fair wages, university autonomy, funding of Nigeria universities, etc.

According to Chijioke (2013) “strike is an organized work stoppage by a body of workers to enforce compliance with demands made on an employer or a group of employers”. Generally, ASUU uses strike as a means to force the government to respect the demand of the Union. Almost all Heads of State and Presidents of Nigeria between 1988 and 2013 have been compelled by ASUU through strikes to meet their demands. In general, causes of grievances among university staff or lecturers are salary structure, conditions of service, general improvement of teaching and learning facilities, university autonomy, funding of university education, disciplinary matters and national issues. Among the major causes of students unrests, are inadequate welfare facilities, poor feeding/rising cost of feeding, irregularity of electricity and water suppliers, inadequate transport facilities, secret cult activities, student union election/administration, and issues of national significant.

A. **Causes of grievances among University lecturers:**

- a. **Poor salary and differing salary structure:** The underpayment of university of staff vis-à-vis their counterparts in other economic sectors and the discriminating salary structure between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) have been a major cause of their dissatisfaction.. According to the ASUU chairman in RSUST Dr. Felix Igwe, the situation where “lecturers” were being owed three months salaries by the state government, and that since the strike the government had not called the lecturers for a dialogue on the “crises”, www.informationg.com/Nov.27th,2012. , was bad.
- b. **Conditions of Services:** Closely related to the issue of poor salary is the general condition of service of University staff. This condition of service or employment include such features as working conditions (ie working environment, hours or work, over time shift work, flexible working hours), fringe benefits, (ie sick pay, subsidized meals, pension scheme, company goods at a discount, company cars) and application of fair judicial procedures. For instance, University lecturers could demand for the immediate reinstatement of their colleagues who have been unfairly dismissed or punished by government while acting on their behalf, failure of which might result in strike action. On Feb 2, 2013, the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) announced vacancy for Lecturers and Graduate Assistance along side with the conditions of service which is applicable in the Federal Civil Service and as appropriate in the Nigeria University system.
- c. **University Autonomy:** Government unwarranted interference in the management of university affairs also contributed to the spate of strike actions among its staff. For instance, the seats of Vice-Chancellor and Registrar of universities are keenly contested for. It was noted that the one of the reasons why people leave universities is because there is a lot of interference in academic freedom. Sometimes, however, government intervention is inevitable where there is an ongoing rift among university staff
- d. **Under funding and inadequate infrastructural facilities:** There is gross –under funding in the university system. It was noted that the annual budget on education is low compared to the budget made for other things in the state. For example, budget for elections and numerous huge amount of money mismanaged could be responsible for the existing poor teaching and learning facilities in our universities and poor quality graduates produced.

B. Causes of Student Unrest: 1. Lack of adequate welfare facilities: This has always been a major contributing factor to students' discontent in our universities. Three important aspects normally associated with welfare are health schemes and safety. The welfare of students is also assumed through the provision of social and sports facilities, legal assistance, banks, post offices, proximity of markets, adequate refuse disposal, room furniture such as beds and beddings, reading desks, chairs, wardrobes, book shelves, mosquito nets, wall fans etc. in general. The non-provision of any of these goods or services did not generate as much student agitations as its withdrawal does. For instance, if the university authorities did not provide wall fans in student living rooms for their comfort, student will not normally agitate for them, but once they have been provided and later withdrawn (due to rising cost, perhaps) students will immediately react.

1. **Feedings:** A particularly common cause of strike actions by students is poor feeding. The problem may be due to poor quality and reduced quantity of food, delay in preparation, arbitrary increase in the prices of meals, inadequate number of restaurants to cater for the student population. When for instance, restaurants operating are so few that students are required to wait unduly to have their meals, (because of unavailability of portable water, cooking gas and delays in the supply of food stuffs, etc) at the expense of their academic activities, they may embark on strike actions. In some instances, they may resort to hunger strike with considerable loss to the management of the restaurants.
2. **Irregularity of electricity and water supplies and inadequate telephone services:** Water, electricity and telephone services are essentials for the university education system to function without disruption. When these basic necessities are irregularly provided especially water supplies, students are forced to abandon lectures or at least report late to classes leading to poor academic performance (when alternative plans are not made for their provision using water tankers and steady electricity generations, activities in the university slow down and student resort to express their grievances).
3. **Inadequate transport facilities:** Inadequate transport facilities can generate wide-spread student dissatisfaction especially among those students who are compelled to live off-campus either as a deliberate university policy or because of inadequate hostel accommodation. When the student buses break down, for an extended period without plans for their repair, the affected students are cut off from those in the main campus, leading to poor attendance to academic and other activities.
4. **Secret Cult:** Another major cause of students' conflict in the modern university education system is the nefarious activity of lawless organizations such as secret cults. These are occasions when the members use the period of their initiation ceremony and other unwholesome activities to inflict harm on law-abiding students. Because these latter students are normally in the majority, they group themselves and engage in open confrontation with those students who consider the university environment a fertile ground to demonstrate their poor family upbringing. Sometimes some innocent students, even passer-by, lose their lives in the ensuing conflicts and university property is destroyed. To reduce conflict in Rivers State University of Science and Technology, it was made a compulsory task for students to sign under-takings against secret cults.
5. **Students Union elections/administration:** Irregularities in the conduct of student union elections and maladministrations by the Students Union Government (SUG) may precipitate ill-feelings among the general student body. Election rigging and ethnicity, etc. characterize students' union elections as is the case with elections in the wider

Nigeria society. When a candidate believes firmly that he has been rigged out of an election, his supporters may react violently. Sometimes the union executives misappropriate the fund being contributed by the entire student body without proper accountability. In addition, when the university authority unjustly punishes a union official, the students may demand for justice, falling which they engage in strike action. The students' union is the mouth-piece of the entire students, and being an autonomous body, any wrongful interference in its legitimate activities is viewed seriously by the students unless the student themselves have vote of no confidence on the elected officials.

6. **National issues:** The cause of students' grievances to be considered stems from their involvement in issues of national significance. Increase in prices of fuel and other essential commodities, national policies, curtailment of their legitimate freedom of expression, can potentially trigger off strike. Students also engage in strike to influence government policy especially its economic and foreign policies taking into consideration the wishes and aspiration of the populace.

Effects of strike action on educational management: Education in a broad sense is a process by which an individual acquires physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born to function.

Uwadia Orobosa (2010) defined education as the ultimate value and hence through the provision of social service, is an agent of change. He also said that education is to a nation what the mind is to the body, just as a diseased mind is handicapped in the coordination and direction of the bodily activities. Therefore, the single most significant complex of social-control tools for national development is found in the educational system. In ancient Greece, the cradle of Western scholarship, education was a highly functional search-light beamed on society, it transcended reading and writing. While the Nigerian states were still under colonization, modern education has already taken place. The development in advanced countries has brought successful industrial revolution and breath-taking development.

Development on the other hand, is a progressive unfolding of the potentialities of a given reality. As it applies to human, it is integration of the various giving, natural, physical, acquired and human of a people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively of their being, as persons of their nation and their real productivity (Orobosa 2010)

The essence of education, whether formal or informal, is to produce a person who will be a useful member of a society. According to Dogle (2010), it must engender in the individual a disposition of personal autonomy, responsibility and relevant forms of life thought and action. The word relevant as used by her is the mother of cultivating individual interest and potentialities while autonomy stands for a person who is able to judge, act and think accurately as well as rationally.

According to Sariki (2013), the importance of education to human beings cannot be over emphasized. Globally, education is considered as a human right that should be accorded to all human beings. It was the reason why a lot of international human right bodies considered education as a fundamental human right. He further said "the first and perhaps the greatest challenges facing Nigeria and making it different for good quality education that is adequate, that is capable of bringing about sustainable development, is adequate funding by federal state and local governments to the extent that funding has been in response to conditionality's imposed by international financial institution (IFTs). In 1997 and 2000 statistics show that federal government expenditure on education was below 10% of overall expenditure. The fervent

interruption of our education system is not limited to higher institution. Primary and secondary school teachers have embarked on strike in recent times to voice their grievances, too.

The indefinite strike action embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) 11th March 2013 crippled academic activities in nearby Universities like the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport) and the newly established Rivers State University of Education (UOE). The industrial action lasted for at least six months, it was called off on 5 Dec. 2013. Lecture halls were empty; students were just loitering around for a whole session. According to Babaferos (2013), the effect of strike action on educational development has negative and positive effects on both the students and lecturers. He said, he has done empirical analysis of what Nigerian students as well as lecturers may gain and lose as a result of strike actions.

Gain to lecturers: Increased allowances for project supervision, call duty, extra hours worked, hazards etc.

- o Payment of salaries and entitlements for several months where they did not work.
- o Those schools that did not partake in the struggle will also benefit from the infrastructure, funds and the earned allowances

Negative effects of strike on lecturers: Delay in obtaining masters and Ph.D for those still doing their Post-Graduate studies.

Gains of student: The funds released for infrastructure will be used to meet the immediate needs of schools: construction of more hostels, equip libraries, provide internet connectivity, build laboratories, etc.

Negative effect of strike on students: Battered academic calendar: This will result in an abridged semester.

- o Delay in the release of Admission list. It is pertinent to note that a lot of prospective university students do not know their fate regarding admission as a result of strike action.
- 1) Most academic activities for school year are distorted. This is one of major cause of producing unqualified graduate 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. “An idle man” they say “is the devils workshop” they say!. There is therefore, the need for a re-evaluation of the education sector.
 - 2) **Incessant strikes affect the academic performance of students:** When 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. These turn some students into certificate seekers instead of knowledge seekers. According to Elemba (2013), any government with a poor education system is heading towards a black future.

Eradication of strike actions in tertiary institutions: On a number occasions, government, administrators, policy makers and researchers have sought solution to strike related problems while some practical measures have in the past been taken to eradicate strike actions in institutions of higher learning. This is essential because industrial peace is the panacea to effective achievement of the goal of tertiary education.

Allen (2005) stated that in the past, government has initiated grandiose schemes such as committees of experts and national incomes commission and industrial conferences. These are aimed at pricing industrial peace. In this same vein, Denga (2009) stated that it is necessary for the organizational leaders to be aware also of the various organizational arms that are charged

with the responsibility of effectuating strike actions. Notable among organizations are the labour administrative machinery of the state, the joint consultative committees, collective bargaining committees, labour courts and strike arbitration panels. An effective utilization of these bodies will help but the management needs to emphasize a preventive measure so that the need to resort to these bodies will perhaps be unnecessary.

Promoting collective bargaining has been realized as an effective means of minimizing strike actions. Allen (2005) however, noted that collective bargaining can never be abstracted from the power struggle no matter how impressive its apparatus for rational settlement of disputes. Collective bargaining is seen as negotiation about working conditions and terms of employment between an employers, a group of employers or one or more employers' organization on the other hand with a view to reaching agreements.

Effects of strike actions on students: Disruption of academic programme and extension of course duration: The programme of other bodies such as West African Examination Council (WAEC), Joint Matriculation Examination Board (JAMB) and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) are similarly adversely affected. The adverse effects of strike actions whether embarked upon by lecturers or by the students is that the academic programme of students are disrupted and their stay in the university prolonged. Those on admission compound their problems by engaging on unethical practice to secure a certificate they could not defend to boost their chances of job-seeking. They deprive those students who depend solely on their knowledge the opportunity to compete.

2. **Student/Armed forces confrontation:** When students revolt or merely embark on peaceful demonstration, armed forces are invited at the instance of the university authorities to forestall possible break down of law and order. Because they understand the language of force and coercion, these uniformed men, sometimes go beyond the instruction they receive to engage the student in bloody confrontation, lose their lives, and university property worth million of naira, destroyed. If students are striking in response of unfavorable government policy, public buildings and installations are destroyed and their parents/guardians, of course, are compelled to bear the cost of replacing or repairing the affected property.

3. **Mass resignation of university lecturers:** The combined effects of misunderstanding and poor remuneration are the mass exodus of lecturers in search of more gainful employments. This further reduces the staff strength of universities. According to Adesina (2008), the immediate effect of the depressing working conditions in university is mass resignation, departure of hard-working colleagues to North America, Western Europe, the Middle East and even to African Countries with less buoyant economics than oil-rich Nigeria.

Most lecturers are completely disillusioned with the gross neglect of successive governments of the educational sector and government hard-line posture to their legitimate demands. They cannot plan their schedule such as the period to proceed on sabbatical leaves. It is unfortunate that government has not really evaluated the financial loss it incurs as a result of incessant strikes in our educational institutions as it does in other sectors of the economy. Given the above stated effects of strike actions, one begins to wonder about the prospect of education, which emphasizes the acquisition of skills through teaching and learning of skilled subject.

The aim of education is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It helps to adjust properly in one's own environment. Knowledge helps the man to overcome the nature and satisfy human wants. Education has not really failed because; one aim of education is to make people critical. Strike may be employed to ensure that criticisms are taken seriously. The modern

instrument for the realization of education is the school system which includes all levels of education from primary schools to universities.

Summary of the Review: Lecturers like workers in other sectors of the economy embark on strike actions when their demands are not met, or they are not granted opportunity to express such and the conditions they give consequently expires. Unlike other trade unions, whose losses incurred during industrial conflicts are easily quantified in monetary terms, the financial losses during strike actions in the educational sector e.g Rivers State university of Science and Technology are not so obvious. This partly explains the seemingly lack of commitment of those concerned to find a lasting solution to these incessant strikes. Strike actions have assumed alarming dimension and of greater frequency, longer duration with the passage of time. Strikes are no longer declared temporarily, but indefinitely until grievances or demands are met. Strike actions have contributed so much to the falling standard of education, a better truth many people are unwilling to admit.

In general, the causes of dissatisfaction among university lecturers are poor salaries, relative to those of their counterparts, poor conditions of service, poor condition of teaching and learning facilities, inadequate funding, etc. The causes of student unrest are inadequate welfare facilities, poor feeding, irregularities in the supply of essential amenities, inadequate transport facilities, secret cult activities, student union elections/administration and issues of national significance.

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