



Impacts of Academic Staff Union of Universities Strikes on Human Capital Development in Nigeria “2015-2022”

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Abstract

The constant disruption of academic activities through shutting down universities in Nigeria has become a recurring plague due to the inability of the Federal Government to satisfactorily meet the demands of Academic Staff Union of Universities on issues bordering on welfare of workers. These have translated to frustrations, damage, and tremendous setbacks as a result of industrial actions that have led to reduction in productivity due to lack of investment on human capital. The foregoing phenomenon precipitated the innate desire to: examine the extent to which academic staff union of universities strikes have affected the interest of students on education in Nigeria; and ascertain the extent to which academic staff union of universities strikes have led to loss of efficient and effective lecturers to other lucrative jobs. The study adopted an aggregate of qualitative sources; notably, information was gleaned from journals, textbooks, newspapers, web pages and government publications. Data collected were analyzed through historical and interpretative methods. Human capital theory was used as the theoretical umbrella. The results showed that there was migration of lecturers to foreign countries in search of better condition of service. Privileged Nigerians were sent abroad to study, and extension of academic programs to the students who could not afford to study abroad. The paper recommended amongst others that the Federal government of Nigeria should pay salary that would encourage, retain and attract lecturers from diverse fields to pick up employment from Nigeria.

Keywords: ASUU, Strike, Human Capital Development and Nigeria.

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Introduction

For decades, strike action has become a recurring incidence in Nigeria traceable to face-off between the Federal Government and Academic Staff Union of Universities because of the inability of the parties to reach a common ground on issues of worker's conditions of service. In the light of that, the commitment of the Federal government to the first renegotiated 2009 agreement that led to the signing of the 2013 memorandum of understanding (MOU) and release of ₦200 billion to public universities in February 2014 was truncated when the mantle of leadership was handed over in 2015. Amidst that, in November 2016 there was one-week strike following Academic Staff Union of Universities demand for the implementation of 2013 MOU. Another renegotiation took place and led to 2017 memorandum of action without implementation which resulted to August 13 to September 17, 2017 strike and suspended after a meeting with the Federal government. The strike continued in November 2018 and ended in February 2019 because of the unconscionable manner the Federal government reneged on its agreement. Amidst that, the Federal government ordered all federal workers with effect from October 31, 2019 to enlist on the Integrated Personal and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) for the purpose of receiving salaries in order to curtail ghost workers in the government payroll. That decision was opposed by Academic Staff Union of Universities on the ground that it would undermine the autonomy of the universities. Following that, the Federal government threatened to put on hold salaries of lecturers who default before December 31, 2019. Hence, there was nine months industrial action that took off in March 2020 and ended December 2020.



In the light of the foregoing, Academic Staff Union of Universities on October 13, 2020 recommended a new payroll system: University Transparency Accountability System (UTAS) to the leadership of senate as a better option that must be used as replacement to IPPIS. In the same direction, Academic Staff Union of Universities insisted on the adoption of their March 2021 agreement with the Federal government requesting the implementation of the memorandum of action they signed in December 2020 on issue bordering on its welfare as contained in the renegotiated 2009 agreement. Secondly, demand for the release of earned academic allowances and revitalization funds to the universities. In 2021 the Federal Government was accused of not implementing the agreement after the nine-month strike was called off in December 2020. Following the preceding altercation, the Academic Staff Union of Universities was prompted to embark on warning strike on February 14, 2022 and rolled it over by twelve weeks starting from May 8, 2022 because the Federal Government could not satisfactorily implement the memorandum of understanding signed in 2009. Furthermore, on July 26 and 27, 2022 there was a nationwide solidarity protest by Academic Staff Union of Universities., Nigerian Labour Congress among others to demonstrate their support. After 168-day strike, Academic Staff Union of Universities issued four-week extension. That was heralded by the uproar of the proposal of Nimi Briggs-led committee that, ₦1.12 trillion would be required to implement Academic Staff Union of Universities demand.

Given the inability to resolve the altercation between the Federal government and Academic Staff Union of Universities *via* the Minister of Labour and Employment, the matter was referred to the industrial court for resolution. The court was to determine the legality of the strike,



whether Academic Staff Union of Universities were entitled to emoluments while on strike, (Suleiman 2022). Besides, the Ministry of Labour and Employment approved the registration of two unions namely the National Association of Medical and Dental Academics (NAMDA) and the Congress of Nigerian Universities Academics (CONUA) in an attempt to weaken the influence of Academic Staff Union of Universities and break the rank of lecturers. In the end, through the intervention of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria bearing in mind the irreparable damage done on the lives of students who became idle, on October 14, 2022, the union suspended the strike irrespective of the fact that, the issues in dispute were not well addressed, following intense negotiation with the government with emphasis on meetings led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives Femi Gbajabamila.

On account of the unending rift between the aforementioned bodies, there was incessant disruption of academic activities through closure of the universities due to industrial actions. Since education is a remedy that solves all human problems coupled with the objective of universities to impart knowledge, skills, attitude, values and norms to students in order to ensure human capital development, nations depend increasingly on them (Ekwoaba & Danesi, 2020). Unfortunately, such interruption of academic activities in the universities made the necessary time apportioned to its qualitative development unattainable because the qualitative service delivery of knowledge and value by the academic was undermined. Hence, it translated to frustrations, emotional and psychological trauma, disappointments, damage and tremendous setbacks that led to reduction in productivity due to lack of satisfactory investment on human



capital development. It is from the foregoing that, the study examined impacts of academic staff union of universities strikes on human capital development in Nigeria.

The incessant strikes posed multiple layers of challenges to human capital development. There was inadequate funding of universities in Nigeria which led to other challenges such as loss of efficient and effective lecturers to other jobs. One major challenge was increment in salary because Nigerian lecturers are the poorest in Africa hence, could not retain the best manpower. Nigerians felt tired, frustrated and lost interest in education. Amidst that, there was lack of preparedness and loss of motivation on the part of students to study. Another puzzle was that the strike altered academic calendar of students and made education unbearable to them. It increased the number of years students spent in schools and shortened academic sessions. The maintenance of equipments and facilities used to impart knowledge and skills on the students were abandoned within the period of strikes. Flowing from the identified lapses, the paper is set to:

- examine the extent of which academic staff union of universities strikes have affected the interest of students on education in Nigeria; and
- ascertain the extent of which academic staff union of universities strikes have led to loss of efficient and effective lecturers to other lucrative jobs abroad.

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

Concept of Strike

The term, strike, is traceable to the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom in 1768 as a weapon of self-defense against the unjust policies of the management. Strike depicts discontinuance from work by the employees of an organization collectively either through a



union in an attempt to refuse to work especially when they are seeking for or resisting a change in their employment conditions (Archie, (n.d.)). In other words, strike is a method through which employers and employees balance power over their areas of disagreements. In the same vein, it is a mass refusal of employees to work because of their grievances over salaries and conditions of services in order to attract improvement or assuage a puzzle related to their conditions of services, (Abaekwume, 2022). Similarly, it portrays an action showcased collectively by employees of an organization geared towards expressing their grievances in order to get favourable feedback from the parties concerned (Adavbiele, 2015).

Concept of Human Capital Development

It is worthy to note that, human beings reserve the ability to learn, change, innovate and make available the creative goal for the sustenance and survival of an organization. In other words, human capital is the enhancement of an individual's abilities through training and education in order to effect a change on productivity or job performance. These abilities collectively make up human capital and any attempt to improve or increase on those qualities through training and education constitutes human capital development (Manuere, 2017). Flowing from that, human capital development becomes an aggregate investment on human beings aimed at the development of the individual and the society. Such investments are channeled towards health, education, on-the-job training and migration that improve productivity of workers (Nwobi, 2022). Similarly, human capital development means increase in productivity through training, education and other professional initiatives in order to enhance investment on knowledge, skills and abilities, among others to improve personal wellbeing (Marimuthu, 2009). Suffice to say



that, the fulcrum of productivity in any institution lies on investment in human capital that shapes it to fit into the competitive world.

Nexus between Strikes and Human Capital Development in Nigeria

Once there is strike action, a substantial development of human capital is lost daily as activities in several institutions become paralyzed. When it happens, human capital development becomes the worst hit because the cogent assumption underlying this relationship is that, increased learning, increases productivity. Regrettably, the unending strike action between the Federal government and Academic Staff Union of Universities impeded academic learning in all facets. According to Ideniyi, Eze and Onyeisi (2016), analysts were of the opinion that, the target of becoming a leading world economy by the year 2020 would be possible only when efforts are geared towards implementing government plans on human capital development. The nexus is that, unfortunately, the Federal Government has not done well in the satisfactory implementation of policies on education. It was in the light of this that, Academic Staff Union of Universities embarked on strike.

Furthermore, health as a sub-system of human capital was neglected despite the fact that, human capital entails improvement on the living conditions of employees. In the universities, the denial of the allowances of staff hindered employees of the institution from seeking medical attention where and whenever there was need. In a similar vein, Marimuthu, Arokiasamy and Ismail (2009), argued that, greater attention was apportioned to training related aspects of human beings not minding the fact that, human capital investment is any activity that improves the quality (productivity) of the worker. On that footing, training is an essential component of human capital



investment. It means knowledge and training required and undergone by a person that increases his or her capabilities in performing activities of economic value. Worthy of note is that, Academic Staff Union of Universities' strike stunted the training of both the students and the lecturers who are the human resources of the institutions. Students and lecturers were no longer interested in research; they were cut off from being improved in terms of knowledge, skills acquisition, and even those who lose interest in the strike migrate to other countries where they would get better and more befitting conditions of services they were denied in Nigeria as a result of incessant industrial action.

To strengthen that, the stakeholders were unconcerned about the deplorable condition of service of lecturer that made them embark on strikes. Amidst that, the federal government refusal to budget adequate fund for education to meet the plight of the universities was because they could send their children abroad on training hence; it became a brain gain to foreign countries. In confirming this, Oloja (2020) quipped that “destroying any nation does not require atomic bombs or the use of missiles. It only requires lowering the quality of education and allowing cheating in the examination by the students”. It translates to the fact that, parents die at the hands of doctors, buildings collapse at the hands of engineers, money is lost at the hands of accountants, humanity die at the hands of religious scholars, justice is lost on the hands of judges because of the collapse of education. In other words, the collapse of education as a result of the unending rift between the two parties given the strike action jeopardized knowledge, value and skills acquisition as well because there were no qualified and motivated lecturers to impact them on the students. That reflected lack of connection between strike actions and human capital



development. To wrap it up, the relationship that existed allowed incessant strike action to hinder effective and satisfactory investment in human capital development within the Nigerian educational system.

Theoretical Framework

The study rested on Human Capital Theory due to its relevance because workforce is presently understood as an asset to be nurtured and developed continuously in order to achieve a sustainable set of goals. The key advocates of the theory are Adam Smith a 17th and 18th Centuries Scottish Economist, Greg Becker (1930), Schultz (1902-1998) a Nobel Prize winning economist and Mincer Jacob (1960s). The argument is that, the primary focus of investment should be in human capital through education and training geared towards improving skills and knowledge in order to improve stock of human capital.

Tenets of the theory: Human capital theory has the following tenets:

- Human beings stand a chance of increasing their productive capacity through education and skill training.
- It lays emphasis on employee's security.
- It encourages organizations and society at large to invest in education of human beings
- It is a source of motivation to employees which makes them have competitive advantages.

Application of the Theory to the Study

Investment in education improves stock of human capital. When there is an expenditure on education, on-the-job training etc for instance, it translates to future productive capacity at the expense of present consumption. This could be feasible when the investment is more than depreciation. In that direction, the strike actions embarked upon by universities lecturers was



borne out of the fact that, productivity kept decreasing given lack of investment on human capital by the Federal Government. This was reflected on the inability of the Federal Government to yield to the agreements reached in line with the demands or needs of education (Nwobi, Onwuka & Okeke 2022). To pull out of the lapses of frequent strike action, the federal government has to yield to the demands of Academic Staff Union of Universities through investing in education, skills and values in order to enhance job satisfaction and performance.

Methodology

To achieve the goal of the research, this study adopted an “*ex post facto*” design because it examines past or prior occurrences in order to understand a current situation. Again, the phenomenon took place naturally and has dependent and independent variables but the independent variable was not subjected to manipulation in this study. The study adopted an aggregate of secondary sources. Notably, information was gleaned from journals, textbooks, newspapers, web pages and government publications. Meanwhile the data collected for the study were analyzed through historical and interpretative methods.

Findings and Discussion

1. The extent of which academic staff union of universities strikes have affected the interest of students on education in Nigeria

Most professionals and skilled personnel are products of university education. For that reason, an unending strike action denied the potential human capital the needed full training required to become competitive in the global world. That translated to universities churning out half-baked graduates for instance in medicine amidst Academic Staff Union of Universities strike and



shutting educational activities. This is because many institutions would rush the students in order to close up the gap in academic workload hence, the chances of the students efficient learning devoid of the stress of hurrying to prepare for continuous assessment, tests and examinations became impeded. The curriculums were usually covered in a hurry and shortly after, examinations knock at the door. A clear case was the submission of a final year law student who complained that, at the end of the previous nine months strike in 2020, they were forced to cover up their curriculum in just five weeks. That meant studying for two or three test per night on a daily basis. That affected the investment on the students who are human capital thus their output in general dropped (Jalal 2022). The generality of Nigerians would suffer it because when they seek healthcare, the same doctors would diagnose and administer drugs thus the chances of loss of lives or being maimed as a result of wrong diagnosis would definitely spring up. In engineering, a quack engineer would build substandard structures which would translate to the collapse of infrastructures leading to loss of lives and properties. The same thing would be replicated in other fields of study undermining human capital development.

Consequently, several students became lethargic towards their academic training due to prolonged strike action. This translated to production of half-baked graduates who add virtually nothing to the nation's development (Ojukwu 2022). Again, the graduates they would churn out won't have the competences required to rebuild the nation's development measured in terms of its patriotic human capital. Besides, the strikes denied the universities the opportunity of being able to produce a culturally literate society for generating, harnessing ideas, knowledge, initiating and driving social, economic innovation and ensuring national competitiveness



globally (Olaopa 2022). In a related development, the strike action hindered academic research which is an integral part of education because it plays a major role in revamping and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Lecturers and students lost the drive to embark on academic research. Supervisors were hardly seen by students and could not find students to administer research instruments on. Part of the lapses was poor budgetary allocation. Similarly, in 2020, the budgetary allocation to education was ₦771.5 billion (6.7%) out of ₦10.33 trillion. In 2022, it was ₦1.29 trillion (7.9%) out of ₦16.39 trillion. That was a reflection of unimpressive investment in human capital development due to poor funding or allocation to education in Nigeria irrespective of the fact that, Benjamin Franklin quipped that, an investment in knowledge pays the best interest. Unfortunately, the government could not fund the educational sector adequately as expected. Given the poor funding, lecturers in the universities lacked the current and requisite skills to impart knowledge due to absence of training hence, they imparted obsolete information to students who ended up being unemployable (Ashakah 2022).

To further elaborate, students lost interest in education and resorted to sourcing for means of livelihood through engaging in illegal money making activities, thus, many students desired that, the industrial action should continue. Others resolved in their minds never to return to school due to the value of the salary they earn and may not be fortunate to find such jobs again after graduating from school. That was a demonstration of the extent to which students lost interest in education. In the same vein, the incessant strike forced most privileged Nigerians to send their children abroad for educational pursuit. Some vowed never to enroll their children in Nigerian universities again. To confirm that, Peterside (2020) infers that, due to incessant strike action,



several Nigerians migrated to foreign countries for studies which made countries such as Ghana, Benin Republic and Togo known previously to be beneath Nigeria now benefiting from education capital flight from Nigeria. In the same context, Lawal (2022) submits that, Nigeria loses a whopping sum of ₦1.5 trillion per annum to overseas studies.

It doubled the cost of providing the basic amenities for the students by the parents. Accommodation of students outside the campus expired without being utilized. Eventually, landlords requested for renewal of rents irrespective of the strike because they are out to maximize profit. A shortfall in providing these needs made the students suffer throughout the semester (Sanchi, 2022).

2. The extent to which academic staff union of universities strikes have led to loss of efficient and effective lecturers to other lucrative jobs abroad.

Worthy of note is that, the expectations of lecturers were cut off because of the policy of “no work no pay” of the Federal government. It simply denied lecturers their remuneration since February 2022 despite the agreement of the government and the union on non-victimization of its members. This weakened the unions resolve and kept human capital development in bondage and a structural imbalance that led to numerous other lapses (Adavbiele 2015). In the light of that, the unhealthy nature of universities due to regular strike actions drove the best brains into disbursing their intellectual energy and seriously making input to Gross Domestic Product in foreign nations where they found better conditions of service.

Laying credence to that, due to continuous strike action Nigerians became the highest education migrants because of the quality offered in public universities. There was dissatisfaction of the students, lecturers and other family members who carter for the payment of tuition fees and other



financial commitments. The suffering that emanated through the strike forced many to crave for alternative source of income abroad. Several qualified lecturers in diverse fields of endeavour such as health workers moved out of the country in order to better their wellbeing and those of their household. Part of the reasons lecturers in Nigeria left their jobs for foreign universities job was that, the same salary lecturers received since 2009 was what they took home till 2022. With the rapid increase in the exchange rate of naira to a dollar from 1 dollar to ~~N60/N80~~ (naira) in 2009 and from 1 dollar to about ~~N60~~ (naira) as at July 2022. It became unbearable for the lecturers to remain under such poor working condition. The mass exodus of lecturers due to the incessant strike within the period of study was a replication of what occurred in the 1980s and 1990s although the 2009 agreement between Academic Staff Union of University and Federal Government was meant to curtail the brain drain.

Amidst that, the debilitating effects such as poor remuneration led to transition of lecturers to foreign countries to teach while foreigners refused to come to Nigerian universities to lecture because of the unhealthy economic wellbeing of Nigeria. Furthermore, Akasike (2022) confirmed that, the exodus of lecturers during the strike was due to the fact that a Nigerian professor earned 700 dollars monthly less than 3000 dollars paid in Ghana and in United Kingdom between 8000 and 10, 000 pounds sterling monthly. Such income inequality precipitated the desire of Nigerian lecturers to travel out to foreign universities for better income. That led to dearth of lecturers in Nigerian universities which translated to employment of quarks who are unqualified as lecturers. That in turn undermined human capital development of students. To confirm further, Lovina (2022) and the Akwa Ibom state chapter of Academic Staff



Union of Universities Chairperson Dr. Uduk Happiness concurred that, lecturers and professors at University of Uyo, Nigeria who had the opportunity left their jobs for better condition of service abroad and that more were also at the verge of migrating to other countries because of poor remuneration amidst the strike actions.

As an addendum to that, Human Capital Development Index of Nigeria in terms of rating remained low. In the year 2020 Nigeria scored 0.36 on Human Development Index behind several other countries such as Rwanda which scored 0.38, Sierra Leone 0.36, Sudan 0.38, South Sudan 0.31, South Africa 0.43, Ghana 0.45, Kenya 0.55, Algeria 0.53, Brazil 0.55, Indonesia 0.54 and India 0.49. It became disheartening as revealed from the above summation that, Nigeria has been foot dragging on investment in human capital development. That translated to the failure of the nation to develop and improve the wellbeing of its citizens through education that gives birth to high quality human capital stock and a productive platform for economic development (Business day 2020).

Conclusion

The regular Academic Staff Union of Universities strike is an ill wind that has interrupted academic activities. It caused increase in the number of years' students spent in school, led to lack of mastery of the courses due to short sessions in schools, equipments and facilities were also affected. The result showed that, students became lethargic towards academic training. The drive for research was lost among lecturers and students. Academic research that enhanced quality of teaching and learning has been disrupted. This has forced students to be engaged in illegal money making activities as a means of livelihood. The cost of providing the basic



amenities by parents for their kids who are students doubled. Privileged Nigerians were sent abroad to study. Nigerians became the highest education migrants' hence human capital development has become dangerously threatened.

Recommendations

- There should be improvement on the quality of education through adequate funding of the universities. The Federal government should allocate adequate fund necessary for the running of the universities with regards to teaching and research. When that is done, students and lecturers would have all they require for teaching, learning and research in order to be competitive globally. That would stop strikes, delays in academic programs and make students crave to study in Nigeria.
- To reduce the mass exodus of lecturers from Nigeria to foreign countries, the Federal Government should brace up to pay salaries that would encourage, attract and sustain the lecturers from diverse fields of endeavour to pick up employment in Nigeria.
- To redress the issues of lack of interest of students on education and loss of efficient and effective lecturers to other lucrative jobs abroad, there should be increase in the salaries and allowances of universities workers. The federal government should set up a committee on brain drain that would come up with recommendations on the way forward. It must be implemented via enforcement in order to have a significant impact on economic crisis. When this is achieved, students would be sure of a stable academic calendar and the quality of education. Besides, lecturers will not be moved because income inequality would have been closed.



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