

Psychological Effects of Strike Actions on Academic Staff of Public Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined the psychological effects of strike actions on Academic Staff of Public Universities in Nigeria. Content analysis was adopted for the paper. Both secondary and primary data were used in the paper to support the points raised. The data were sourced from national and international dailies, published, and unpublished papers, articles, and reference materials. This paper concludes that poor funding of public universities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, integrated payroll and personnel information system (IPPIS), poor and inconsistent payment of salaries, poor conditions of Service, political interference in University management, and poor implementation of the agreement reached with Union constitute major reasons for strike action. The effect of these results in health challenges, brain drain, low productivity, manpower wastage, a backlog of workloads, and suspension of research. This also causes political and economic turmoil which is often the backdrop of rising negative emotions such as increased hunger, a lack of work freedom, and income inequality for the staff involved. The presence of this turmoil may contribute to the negative emotions of the academic staff who are on strike. It is recommended that the government should ensure that all agreements signed and reached with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in public universities are implemented as agreed. This will help to prevent strikes action in public universities. Moreover, the government should avoid the economic fallout following inflation which has a similar historic rise in negative emotions for the public universities' academic staff on strike

Keywords: Academic staff, ASUU, Public, Actions, Strike, Nigerian university; Psychological effect of the strike.

Introduction:

Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigerians. They are universities established by the Act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities

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deal with the provision of teaching, research, and community services (Ogunode, 2020). The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education have 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 (FRN, 2014). Public universities in Nigeria are grouped into federal and state-owned universities. The federal universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government (Ogunode, 2020). The total number of federal and state public universities is 49 and 59 across the country (Punch, 2022).

These public universities are designed and structured to function with human and material resources. The materials resources include; administrative blocks, offices, ICT facilities, libraries, water, electricity, internet services, classrooms, instructional materials, etc., while the human resource include the teaching and non-teaching staff. The teaching staff is called the academic staff (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021).

The academic staff is the teaching staff who implement the school curriculum and lectures. They are knowledgeable teachers and character builders. The academic staff is the engine room of higher institutions. They are the pillar and foundation of higher institutions. The academic staff determines the quality of the higher institutions as well as the proper solutions to the Nation's Economic and social problems (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021). The functions of the academic staff revolve around lecturing, preparation of lecture notes, sourcing for instruction materials, assessing the students through continuous assessment and examination, setting exam questions, marking the answer sheet, supervising students' research work, especially theses and dissertations, and preparing the student's grade points. The academic staff conducts different levels of research, presents their findings, and contributes to the development of knowledge in higher institutions (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021).

To realize their objectives of improving their welfare and fighting for their rights, the academic staff in Nigerian universities formed a union called the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The union was formed in 1969. The Union (ASUU) is a trade union body, which like other trade unions is a combination of workers to regulate the terms and conditions of the employment of its members (Iyayi, 2002). Specifically, Abiodun-Oyebanji (2015) and Iyayi in Arikewuyo (2009) identified the following as the principles that guide ASUU as a union includes integrity, transparency and accountability, professionalism, objectivity, and hardworking, courage, sacrifice, and total commitment, internal democracy, teamwork, and group solidarity; as well as patriotism, anti-imperialism, and working-class solidarity.

In the words of Abiodun-Oyebanji (2015) in Kazeem (2009), up to the early eighties (of the 20th century), Nigerian universities were repositories of everything that could be considered excellent in academia, with qualified and adequate academic staff and good working conditions. In addition, funding for infrastructures and research was very reasonable then. Consequently, many budding academics, whether trained in Nigeria or overseas universities, were motivated to look for and take up an academic career in Nigerian universities. The totality of the Nigerian university system was recognized for this and was equally respected. The above position gave a graphic illustration of Nigerian universities in their early stage. Over time, this impressive description has been wholly destroyed (Abiodun-Oyebanji, 2015). Abiodun-Oyebanji (2015) also observed that the champion for the battle to savage and redress the ever-diminishing quality of Nigerian University education appears to be the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The evolution of ASUU as a truly fighting organ followed the successive stages of this destruction of university education. It is no longer news that ASUU as a body of academics has embarked on a series of strike actions over the years. In the words of Abiodun-Oyebanji (2015) and Onoyeme (2012), it is like a cycle in the country. There is hardly any year since 1996 that university lecturers had not gone on strike. Sometimes, they tag it as a warning, indefinite or total strike. University lecturers in Nigeria, through the umbrella body, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), appear to have created for themselves an image of a group whose sole interest is to strike; to the point whereby it looks as if they have lost public sympathy.

The continuous strike actions in the public universities in Nigeria drew the attention of both local and international researchers to carry out different research on it. For instance, Ogunode, Ugochukwu & Jegede (2022) examined the effects of Strike Actions on Nigerian Higher Education Goals and Programme. Adanwa & Ogunode (2022) examined the Impact of strike actions on students of Public universities in Nigeria and the way forward. Lawan & Ogunode (2021) also discussed the strike actions in Nigerian higher institutions: Meaning, causes, effects, achievement, and way forward. Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) looked at the effect of the strike on the management and planning of educational activities in Nigerian universities. Amadi and Urho (2015) investigated educational management planners' view of strike action and its effects on educational management in Universities in Rivers state. Christian (2015) looked at the influence of strike action on the academic performance of students at Alvan Ikoku Federal College. Omotere (2014). Effects of ASUU strike on the academic performance of university students. Edinyang and Ubi (2013) investigated the effect of strike action on human development among social Studies secondary school students in the Uyo local government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. From the above, it is clear that no researcher has researched the effects of strike actions on academic staff on academic staff in Nigerian public institutions. Based on this research gap, this paper is therefore aimed to examine the psychological effects of strike actions on the academic staff of public universities in Nigeria.

Concept of Strike Actions:

There are many definitions of strike given by different scholars. For instance, Grifin (1999) views a strike as a stoppage of work by employees to force the hands of their employer to accept terms and conditions of employment while Idogho (2011) describes strike action as a period when no work is done because of disagreement over wage, promotion, hours of work or other conditions of employment. Nwadi and Oguugua (2005) note that a strike is the absence of a definite and effective industrial relations policy that takes cognizance of the prevailing economic situation in the country. A strike occurs as a result of divergent interests, objectives, or priorities between individual groups, employees, and employers; nonconformity to requirements of task, activity, or process (Obi, 2004). Okeke (2003) argues that a strike is a disagreement between employees and their employers following the failure of one side to meet the demand of the other, to address grievances. These actions are bound to have severe consequences on the productivity of educational institutions.

Ogunode (2020) observes strike action is an endemic problem facing the administration of public universities in Nigeria. Nigerian public universities are known for continuous strike actions by different union groups within the system. The actions are frustrating the administration of public universities in Nigeria. The reasons for the strike actions by union groups include; underfunding of the public universities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, and poor implementation of agreements reached with union groups, and poor working conditions. The implications of the

continuous strike actions on the public universities include; disruption in the academic program, poor quality of education, bad image for the universities, poor ranking internationally, and poor patronage of public universities in Nigeria (Adanwa, & Ogunode 2022; Ogunode, Zhenseh & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

Other Notable Causes of Strike Actions in Public Universities:

There are many causes of strike actions in Nigerian public universities propelled by some factors. In this paper, poor funding of public universities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, integrated payroll and personnel information system (IPPIS), poor and inconsistent payment of salaries, poor conditions of Service, political interference in University management, and poor implementation of agreements reached with the Union are considered.

- i. **Poor Funding of Public Universities:** Poor funding of public universities by the government is a major reason for the strike actions in public universities (Ogunode, Jegede & Musa, 2021). The budgetary allocation for education in the country is inadequate and below 26% of UNESCO recommendations (Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Jegede, 2022; Ogunode & Ndayebom, 2022; Ogunode, Akin-Ibidiran & Ibidiran, 2022). Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) assert that the United Nations in an attempt to improve education in Nigeria recommended that 26 percent of the Nation's budget should be channeled into the education sector. It has been noticed that the Government has never met such conditions, this further results in many universities being underfunded and having poor infrastructural supplies, poor payment of salaries, and poor maintenance of existing plants. Ogunode, Abubakar & Ajape (2021) and Ogunode, Olugbenga, & Ezema (2022) also confirmed that poor funding of public universities is among the factors responsible for strike actions. Research approaches resulted in a wealth of evidence in supports the notion of well-being as changing and changeable at the instance of individual and group. Happiness intervention studies, including meta-analyses, have firmly documented that happiness may change in individuals and populations through some identified effective factors such as the causes of strike action (World Happiness Report, 2022).
- ii. **Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities:** Lawan & Ogunode (2021) submit that another reason why different union groups in the higher institutions embarked on strike actions is the poor infrastructural facilities common to all higher institutions. Okebukola (2005) reported the need assessment survey of the national universities commission and identified the following: (a) only about 30% of the Nigerian student population has adequate access to classrooms, workshops, lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries. (b) Deficient libraries in terms of currency and number of books, journals, and electronic support facilities. (c) Inadequate academic calendar resulting from staff unions' industrial action premised on a low salary, wages/welfare, and student strike often related to inadequate facilities. (d) Lack of practical experience, oftentimes resulting from deficient facilities. The shortage of facilities in public universities is one of the reasons why the unions embark on strike (Omotere, 2014; Ogunode, Ugochukwu & Iroegbu, 2022; Ogunode, Akinjobi & Musa, 2022; Ogunode, Ugochukwu & Jegede, 2022). In addition, addressing the above requires sensitization of the government on the welfare policies that target

structural inequities and provide access to healthy living standards, meaningful and inclusive work, safety, and sufficient economic resources for public universities, corruption, and increase socially sustainable staff communities' quest which plays an important role (World Happiness Report, 2022).

- iii. **Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS):** Public universities in integration into the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) is one of the reasons for embarking on strikes. Lawan & Ogunode (2021) opines that Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) was introduced by the federal government and made it compulsory for all agencies, ministries, and higher institutions to enroll for their salaries and other payment. There had been resistance by ASUU to embrace the IPPIS into the university system. But the Federal Government continually insisted that the payment system was for transparency and not intended to trample upon the university's autonomy nor designed to subsume the university into the civil service. ASUU's former President Biodun Ogunyemi was quoted as saying, "We challenge them to tell us anywhere in the world where IPPIS is implemented in the universities. IPPIS will shut the door against foreign scholars, contract officers, and researchers that we need most dearly. We are opening new universities every day. Ask them how many competent scholars they have in the pool. They have to poach from existing universities." The ASUU developed and offered an alternative payment system, the University Transparency Account System, which it said would equally meet the transparency and accountability requirements of the IPPIS. But after a series of mutually destructive name-calling and blackmail, both parties appear ready for constructive dialogue. Strikes occur due to so many reasons such as failed negotiation, procedural matters, a probationary period of service, disciplinary procedure, principles of redundancy, professional examinations, various unpaid claims, staff loan, pension, and gratuity schemes; salaries and wages, leave, acting allowance, inconveniences allowance, out of station expenses, medical scheme, sickness benefit, etc.
- iv. **Poor and Inconsistent Payment of Salaries:** Poor salaries and unstable payment of earned allowances is among the major reasons public university workers are going on strikes always. Amadi and Urho (2015) note that the underpayment of university 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 major causes of their dissatisfaction. Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) opine that university workers are often underpaid and most times the Government pays part salaries to lecturers. Lecturers are not happy because many politicians go home with bags of money even when such politicians are not as educated as they are. Various studies (Ogunode, Olugbenga & Ezema, 2022; Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu & Ajape, 2020; Ogunode & Abubakar, 2020; Okoli, Ogbondah & Ewor, 2016) also observe that poor salaries of lecturers in the public universities have caused strike actions.
- v. **Poor Conditions of Service:** Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) observe that Teachers are not offered additional incentives and working conditions as their counterparts. For example, those in health and other sectors receive extra payment for hazards in their jobs but such cannot be heard of in education even though there

are also hazards in discharging teaching duties. According to Amadi & Urho (2015), this condition of service or employment includes such features as working conditions (i.e. working environment, hours or work, overtime shift work, flexible working hours), fringe benefits, (i.e. sick pay, subsidized meals, pension scheme, company goods at a discount, company cars) and application of fair judicial procedures. For instance, University unions could demand the immediate reinstatement of their colleagues who have been unfairly dismissed or punished by the government, the failure of which might result in strike action. Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) state that many times the university has no autonomy to operate as an entity without the leaders in political offices trying to use their positions to influence activities. Schools are not allowed to make educational decisions without such interference. This creates problems when educational administrators refuse to buy into the idea of such leaders. Amadi & Urho (2015) noted that the seats of the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar of universities are keenly contested. It was noted that one of the reasons that make people leave universities is because there is a lot of interference in academic freedom. Sometimes, however, government intervention is inevitable when there is an ongoing rift among university staff. In addition, evidence also shows that people are happier when and where they have a sense of ownership and participation in the intervention or policy design process i.e., experience autonomy, empowerment, and social justice (World Happiness Report, 2022).

- vi. **Poor Implementation of Agreement Reached with Union:** Lawan & Ogunode (2021) state that another major causes of strike actions by different union groups in the Nigerian higher institutions are the non-implementation of the agreement reached with the government. The Nigerian government 2009 signed an agreement with the ASUU to eject N1.3 trillion into the universities over five years beginning in 2009, but only a fraction of that sum was released. The inability of the government to release the monies has made ASUU embark on strike actions. Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) agree that workers and employers usually reach agreements after negotiations but in some cases, one party may refuse to honor the agreements. For example, in December 2002, ASUU was on total strike following the Federal Government's failure to honor the agreements it reached with ASUU in 2001 over adequate funding. The 2017 ASUU strike occurred due to the Government's failure to comply with already signed agreements and memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2009 and 2013. This extends to the lingering strike that began in February 2022 and is still on.
- vii. **Psychological Effects of Strike Actions on Academic Staff of Public Universities:** Psychological effect in the context of this study means the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional effects associated with occupational and social impact stressors on an individual or group. Its effect on the academic staff of public universities, therefore, means the profound and permanent reduction in basic skills and loss of control of emotion, and poor behavioral tendencies of the public academic staff of the universities. Issues of Brain-drain, low productivity, manpower wastage, backlog workloads, and suspension of research work would be considered as the psychological effects of strike actions on Academic Staff of Public Universities. The process of recovery may take a long struggle to regain physical, cognitive, and social skills back on track depending on the number of days

the strike actions take. The resultant effect of strike action by academic staff could be debilitating to loss of skills such as executive functions; including planning, multi-tasking, flexible thinking, and reorganization. More importantly, negative emotions have increased globally, and so has civil unrest. According to the Global Peace Index, riots, strikes, and anti-government demonstrations increased by 244% from 2011 to 2019. In 2020, unrest increased exponentially, with 15,000 protests estimated globally (Global Emotion Report, 2022).

- viii. **Health Problem:** The frequent and prolonged industrial actions by ASUU members have caused health-related problems for academic staff. Academic staff that is used to running around every day with work-related activities may suddenly become idle doing nothing at home. (Lawan & Ogunode (2021) submits that most academic staff in Nigeria stays idle during strike actions only a few are engaged with other minor work or business. The effects of staying idle by most academic staff in Nigeria during the strike have led to different illnesses or sicknesses. Backing this submission, Dr. Sandeep Govil, Psychiatrist, Saroj Super Speciality Hospital, submits that, “Sitting idle for longer duration can lead to anxiety, depression, poor thinking capacity, loss of concentration, and even decline in memory (Healthshots, 2021). Such ailments can build up into serious complications like forgetfulness, loss of attention, and severe anxiety and depression”. Sitting for a long duration involves repetitive thinking, slow-moving emotions, and sometimes a negative-thinking pattern. These in turn can give birth to serious mental health issues according to Dr. Gorav Gupta, Psychiatrist, Tulsi Health Care (Healthshots, 2021).
- ix. **Brain-drain:** The incessant strike actions in Nigerian universities have resulted in the migration of academic staff to another sector of the economy and even moving outside the country to seek a better jobs. The strike actions by ASUU have led to brain-drain in the university system. Ogunode (2020) views brain drain as the movement of professionals from developing countries to developed countries for better job offers or greener pastures in other parts of African countries and Europe where they believe that a conducive working environment is better. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has warned the Federal Government against encouraging brain drain with a lingering strike and nonchalant attitude towards the yearnings of ASUU. Odim, Annastashia & Solomon (2018) and Adesina (2008) noted that the immediate effect of the depressing working conditions in universities is mass resignation, departure of hard-working colleagues to North America, Western Europe, and the Middle East and even to African Countries with less buoyant economies than oil-rich Nigeria. Most lecturers are completely disheartened by the gross neglect of successive governments in the educational sector and the government’s hardline posture toward their legitimate demands. This hinders their plans to schedule the period to proceed on sabbatical leaves. Factors responsible for brain drain in Nigerian public universities include; poor motivation, an unconducive working environment, insecurity, underfunding, and political interferences. The implication of brain drain in Nigerian public universities includes; a shortage of lecturers, poor quality of education, and a high student-teacher ratio (Ogunode, 2020).
- x. **Low Productivities:** Strike actions in Nigerian public universities have also resulted in low productivity among the academic staff. Most of the academic staff

do not work during strike actions but engage in other minor jobs less productive than their professional jobs in the classrooms. Daily Trust (2022) reports that a lecturer at Taraba State University, Musa Jibril, submits that the prolonged strike had caused untold hardship to them and members of their families. He said most of them resorted to small-scale businesses, including farming and poultry, while many others use their vehicles for commercial purposes as a means of survival. Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Jegede, (2022) concludes strike action has led to low productivity, high level of crisis, disruptions, hostility, and low standards, suspension of the teaching programme, research programme, community service programme, and programme accreditation of the various higher institutions, poor rating of higher institutions, reduction in internally generated revenue of the higher institutions. These unprofessional jobs of academic staff engaged during the prolonged strike actions have reduced their maximum productive capacity.

- xi. **Loss of Manpower:** The strike actions in the public universities have also led to the loss of manpower. Strike actions by ASSU members in public universities have led to the loss of manpower in the system. Leadership (2022) disclosed that the 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. This duration is sufficient to complete a four-year degree program.
- xii. **Backlog of workloads:** The strike actions embarked upon by members of academic staff have resulted in a backlog of activities like project supervision, completion of scheme of work, submitting committee reports for those in one committee and another committee, grading of assignments tests, and examinations, etc. It is worthy of note that if the strike is called off, there remain a lot of academic backlogs of work. The academic staff has to face serious stress to round up all these backlogs in the departments and offices. Blueprint. (2022) quoted a lecturer who claimed that when the last strike was called off, the management of various universities pressured the lecturers to quickly cover the remaining academic workload for the semester. In a related account, Mark, a senior lecturer at one of the public Universities in Nigeria recalled that after the 9-month ASUU strike in 2020, he went through stress to cover up the curriculum and start exams in just five weeks.
- xiii. **Depression:** Prolonged strike actions have led to the depression of many academic staff of public universities. Much academic staff do not work but stayed idle during strike actions and salaries are not been paid because of the government's 'no work, no pay principle. Depression is one of the most common types of mental health conditions which often develops alongside anxiety. Depression can be mild and short-lived or severe and long-lasting. Some people are affected by depression only once, while others may experience it multiple times. Depression can lead to suicide, but this is preventable when appropriate support is provided (UNICEF, 2020). Much academic staff can no longer feed their families, pay school fees and meet up with personal needs due to unpaid salaries as a result of strike actions. This has resulted in situations that can cause depression and frustration. For instance, Blueprint (2022) reports a lecturer who said "When you have people looking up to you and then you do not have a way to put food on the table, it may emotionally and physically destroy a man. A large number of our colleagues are depressed. One

of my colleagues is currently earning money by riding a motorcycle (Okada) in his village. Imagine how much he can make from that, not in the city, but a village”. Some lecturers have gone into farming and are unable to purchase fertilizers. Another lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who asked to remain anonymous, told Blueprint Weekend how his wife has had compromised on so many things in the family due to paucity of funds while his wife became the breadwinner. He recounted how he can no longer afford to subscribe to DSTV and sustain his family (Blueprint, 2022). Also, Thisday Newspaper (2022) reports that a lecturer at Uniben disclosed that “He lives mostly on begging and borrowing but those who are mostly hit are the ones on regular medication; either hypertensive or diabetic. All these challenges have led to worries, frustration, and depression in the academic staff in Nigerian public universities.

- xiv. **Suspension of Research Work:** The incessant strike actions in the public universities in Nigeria have led to many lecturers’ suspension of their research programs (work) which is the second most-rated core program of the universities (Ogunode, 2020; Ogunode & Ndayebom, 2022; Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Jegede 2022; Ogunode, Ugochukwu & Iroegbu, 2022). Tomori (2022) opined that nothing functions when the universities are on strike. If an international collaborator had an agreement with a scientist doing research in Nigeria, and they fail to deliver results because the university is on strike, it will disrupt the program or project because research grants have a time limit. The implication is that researchers will not be able to access their laboratories or access their funds and even attend scientific conferences. Equipment that requires constant servicing and maintenance suffers damage in strike situations. Therefore, in an ongoing study, for example, there ought to be samples to be collected from a group but it is not possible given the strike for almost six months. Those are ways that the strikes have been affecting scientists. The students’ research work, lecturers’ research work, and international conferences and domestic conferences are also suspended during strike actions in Nigerian higher institutions.

Conclusion:

This paper discussed the psychological effects of strike actions on Academic Staff of Public Universities in Nigeria. The paper concluded that the government needs be sensitive to averting a looming strike with the end in mind that the academic staff’s emotions might take them to the streets if a relevant dialogue alternative is not timely considered.

Recommendations:

- i. The government should ensure that all agreements signed and reached with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in public universities are implemented as agreed. This will help to prevent strikes action in public universities.
- ii. The government should be proactive to negotiate with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in public universities 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.

- iii. The government should increase the salaries of all the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members in public universities. The various welfare package policies should be implemented as formulated.
- iv. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members in public universities should devise other means other than strikes to resolve aggrieved issues. Strike action should be the last resort.
- v. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as a body should improve the loan facilities to members to enable them to cope whenever there is a prolonged strike.

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