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ASUU – FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (FG) DISPUTES AND ITS IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper is on the spite of labour interest behind the FGN and ASUU. The last four decades there has been frequent industrial dispute. The main objectives of the study are to investigate the positive and negative impact of FGN -ASUU dispute. The paper derived its data basically from secondary sources of material from textbooks, journal article, newspaper, through qualitative systematic content analysis, using a theoretical framework of Hegelian dialectics as tool for analysis. One major finding of this study is that there is soured relationship between FGN and ASUU. Since 1980s due genuine demands and have resulted into prolonged strikes, with both positive and negative impacts on university education in Nigeria. The study recommends that ASUU should be involved the installment of responsible government, since they are returning officers of elections and continue the strategy of gorilla warfare in strike tactics, to avoid total collapse of the university system, since that is your farm and the only language the Nigerian government can hear, until ASUU achieve the UNESCO 26% budgetary allocation.

Keywords: ASUU, FGN, Disputes, Impact, University, Education



INTRODUCTION

Over the past forty years, the nation has experienced a notable surge in labour disputes, particularly within public universities, reaching a concerning level owing to its persistent occurrence. The root causes of these frequent labour disputes within the university sector primarily revolve around issues such as insufficient remuneration packages, substandard conditions of service, unfair labour practices, and inadequate provision of essential facilities. The recurring conflicts between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the federal government have significantly plagued the university work environment, leading to substantial disruptions and setbacks within the broader economy. This ongoing discord adversely affects not only the employees but also the university system and, perhaps most significantly, the students, whose educational pursuits are severely impacted (Akpan & Eweke, 2018).

The primary objective of trade unions is to advance the interests of their members, a goal achievable only when the enterprises where their members work thrive. Consequently, trade unions exhibit a vested interest in the success of these entities and actively contribute to their advancement by collaborating on initiatives aimed at enhancing productivity and efficiency (Chigozie, 2017). In this pursuit, they engage in cooperative measures to foster increased output. Moreover, trade unions, exemplified by entities like ASUU, shoulder the responsibility of organizing the workforce, a crucial element in the production process and overall efficiency. The workforce, comprising individuals utilizing their capacities and skills to provide services, plays a pivotal role in earning a livelihood and contributing to personal and economic development. By acknowledging their role in the organization and promotion of a productive workforce, trade unions, including ASUU, share in the responsibility for maintaining positive industrial relations (Pemedede, 2007). This collaborative approach between trade unions and management is instrumental in fostering a conducive working environment and achieving mutual goals.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) operates as a trade union whose activities align with the laws of the land, characterized by lawful practices consistent with the principles of trade unionism. ASUU approaches various issues from diverse perspectives, and its occasional display of courage, bordering on a radical and militant stance, often leads to conflicts or disagreements with the government. Over the years, disputes and dissatisfaction with the federal government have arisen, particularly regarding issues such as university autonomy, substandard conditions of service, inadequate funding, and an unfavorable academic environment. These concerns have persisted for an extended period, resulting in unproductive and deadlock negotiations and dialogues with successive Federal Ministries of Education (Iyayi, 2002; Pemedede, 2007; Chigozie, 2017).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) traces its origins back to the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT), which was established in 1965. At that time, Nigeria had five universities: The University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960); the University of Ibadan (1962); University College Ibadan (1948); Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; and the University of Lagos (both established in 1962) (ASUU, 2017).

Since the era of the military regime under General Olusegun Obasanjo and the subsequent civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, ASUU has consistently played a crucial role in advocating for the intellectual community's interests, not only within Nigeria but on a global scale. This commitment has persisted through successive military administrations, including those of Buhari, Babangida, Abacha, and Abdulsalami (ASUU, 2013). ASUU has undertaken the responsibility of championing intellectual causes and actively contributing to the advancement of education in Nigeria.

Since the 1980s, ASUU has been in dialogue with the federal and state governments to revitalize the Nigerian University System due to challenges such as the mass departure of experienced academics, inadequate facilities, underfunding, and erosion of autonomy. ASUU contends that improved pay and working conditions are essential for Nigerian academics. Despite the consistent ASUU stance, the government persists with its approach to address issues in the university system, leading to an ongoing impasse (Chigozie, 2017). This study examines ASUU's impact, both positive and negative, in the Nigerian university system and aims to provide insights for resolution and improvement.

METHODOLOGY

The data for the study were basically derived from secondary sources of materials, such as textbooks, journal material, newspapers and magazine etc. through a systematic qualitative content analysis, and the scope of the study is on ASUU-federal Government dispute and its impact on university education in Nigeria.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The paper focused on the Nigerian Federal Government (FGN) and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) dispute and its impact on university education in Nigeria. The study evaluated the impacts (positive and negative) of the dispute on university progress on infrastructural development, staff welfare and development and academic curricula from 2010-2020. This period has shown that the FGN and ASUU have had series of consistent disputes within this decade more than ever. The paper sees ASUU as a union and a unit of analysis at both the federal and the state level.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Hegelian dialectics, by Winfield Richard Dien (1990) published in 2020 by the Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy, in attempt to make popular Hegel's logic (Westphal, 2003; Tylor, 1975; Harris, 1983;). Dialectics is the key to competency Hegel. According to Hegel, everything is a process of recommending opposite inclination leading to a state of disequilibrium before the aquarium is restored. Nevertheless, the new equilibrium that emerges from a clash of opposites is generally of a greater order like the previous one. As a result, it is a process of development. This indicates that development cannot be made without conflict and controversy. This is the way it is demonstrated;

(XY)

(X)Y

(XY)

In the initial state, represented by XY, X is dominant, and Y stands as the opposing element, establishing stability but also a constant tension between them. As time progresses, Y gains strength, challenging the existing X-centric condition. X must adapt to survive this confrontation. Eventually, in the third phase, X and Y find reconciliation, restoring balance and signifying a new beginning. This cyclical process of dialectics continues, with resolution sparking a fresh struggle until returning to the fundamental origin (NDU, 2008).

Disputes between ASUU- federal government Nigeria is likened to dialectics. Opposing forces are engaged in combat. ASUU opposes federal government's directive to maintain universities status quo and by making it stagnant, due to lack of autonomy, low pay, poor working conditions as well as deteriorating infrastructure, and failure to implement and improve on 2009 negotiation and agreement, among others. ASUU perceives the federal government's stance as a lack of sensitivity and political will, asserting that the government has failed to meet essential criteria, emphasizing the need for prioritizing education, particularly university education.

Federal Government allegedly sees ASUU demands as unreasonable and unjustifying demand, which seems to have angered the government. This was the initial state of affairs which is referred to as first instance (XY) which later led to an imbalance. They are perennially locked in a deadlock over what ASUU views as the Federal Government's failure to provide the necessary funding for the revitalization of Nigeria's sick and deteriorating public universities. X and Y have now been removed from the box, implying anti-thesis, a time of struggle during which ASUU opposes and Challenges the current state. As a result, the federal government (X) must now adjust its stance in order for the system to prevail in the face of opposition from ASUU (Y).

ASUU and Federal Government reconcile again at the third moment to restore equilibrium. However, this time, the result and order are of a higher degree than when it first

started, resulting infrastructural development, sustainable library for both lecturers and students, grants-in-aid, higher wages, better conduction of service and revitalization of universities through need assessments, to mention just few and most recently the nom inclusion of ASUU in IPPIS, the granting of autonomy and allowing universities utilize their internally generated revenues.

This dispute, reorganization also signifies a new fresh beginning (epoch), for the characters who struggle for survival and maintenance of their system, which do not stop there, but go on in their stories. As a result, the battle or struggles continue, as for labour slogan, struggles continue, Aluta CONTINUA, indefinitely.

The new order also signifies as new phase in the ASUU- Federal Government disputes. This indicates that ASUU battle universities survival is never ending, since federal and state governments are not having will to improve on our public universities in Nigeria, since dialectics never ends, until all returns to the eternal spirit from whence everything originated of the new order signals the beginning of ASUU fight as well as a new clash in dialectics.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

1. Academic staff union (ASUU): means a labour union of all Academic staff in Universities in Nigeria, responsible as a vehicle for protecting and advocating the welfare of its members.
2. Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN): Nigeria is a federation consists of states and a federal capital Territory. Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble Sovereign State to be known by the name, federal republic of Nigeria (1999 constitution, 2011).
3. Trade disputes: in this context are disagreements between employers and workers or among management or workers, which are related to conditions of service, wages etc.

THE MATRIX OF A SOUR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FGN-ASUU

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is a successor Nigeria Association of University Teachers (NAUT). The NAUT was formed in 1965, with five (5) Universities in Nigeria. The NAUT was not in radial organization. In 1978, the NAUT was transformed into ASUU, the objective of ASUU was not merely to pursue just and proper condition of service. A new objective of the Union was protection and advancement of the socio-economic and cultural interest of the Nation, and Encouragement of the participation of its member in the affairs of the university system and of the nation (ASUU, 2017).

ASUU began to assume the role of opposition to the waste and theft of Nigeria's resources by the rulers. The union's orientation shifted: This shift was condition not only by the

deteriorating of the economy in Nigeria; but due to the intellectual origin of radial theories of development and underdevelopment at the time (ASUU, 2017). Anikpo contend that, it was the search in the Nigerian academic for a resolution of the problem of economic crisis and development in Nigeria, which later metamorphoses who a serious debate in the Nigeria crisis, as a result of theories and thought of Karl Marx, an Frederick Engels, Samir Amin, Emmanuel Arrighi, Andre Gudre Frank, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, etc. (ASUU, 2017).

It was in response to this that emerged an ideological transformation of ASUU. At the University of Ibadan, University of Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Benin, University of Calabar, university of Port Harcourt, University of Jos and University of Nigeria, Nsukka within the Academic staff union of University sprang up groups', academics working within the framework of political economy and political science (ASUU, 2017).

It was in the 1980s that the university academics began to make a forceful case for university antinomy. By 1985, ASUU had become a very positive, progressive member of NLC. ASUU's membership benefited the congress in promoting quality debate and leadership culture (ASUU, 2017: p. 81). There is no doubt that federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) does not feel comfortable with the Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU). There is equally no doubt that ASUU views the FGN with distrust and Suspicion (Anikpo, (ed). 2011).

In our social level, there are paradoxical ambivalence in the attitude of some segments of the Nigerian society towards university lecturers. While the lecturers are highly revered as the epitome of intellectual success, they at the sometime despised as the embodiment of financial failure (Anikpo, 2017). The ambivalence becomes ever more pronounced in the case of the federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). For over several decades successive Government of Nigeria federal Government loudly proclaimed the absolute importance of education in the development of the country especially in preparing younger generation for future leadership and productive roles. Yet, the practical involvement of the FGN in education, especially at the University level, does not at any time suggest a serious engagement with the future of the youth. One major act of unserious is the reluctance by FGN officials, to provide adequate funds for the various activities of the educational sector including adequate salaries for teachers. In spite of the United Nations bench mark of at least 16 per cent annual budget for the funding of education, Nigerian government have never exceeded 7 percent of the annual budgets for this purpose (Anikpo, 2011). Thus, the crisis in the educational sector, is as a result of this under funding reverberate most within the university system

Anikpo noted that in Nigeria, experience has showed that governments view any critical voices as opposition and enemies' voices. That has made them to label the university lecturers

as those who criticize government failures and government official, and has never failed to respond in their ways to be hostile. This has resulted in the manner between ASUU-FGN sour and acrimonious relationship in Nigeria.

It is this sour relationship that has driven the FGN and ASUU to various disputes since 1980s to 2023 today. The year 2023, ASUU embarked on three months strike on issues of renegotiation agreements, IPPIS and others. There is also an ethical dimension to this unfortunate development. In Nigeria, government officials are reputed to be externally corrupt. It should be noted here and many other quarters that the highest obstacle to development in the country is corruptions perpetrated in government circles. Funds meant for infrastructural development such roads; power, water etc. are classified into personal account of government officials through their contractor collaborators (Anikpo, 2011).

It is believed that ASUU activism is as a result of this sordid state of Nigeria public universities. While a government official sees ASUU activities and request as an effort to undermine the credibility of government. This has made government official to see ASUU in as confrontational terms.

ASUU-FGN DISPUTES & THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

ASUU-FGN has been embroiled in prolonged conflicts since 1980, continuing into the present year, 2023. The disputes have resulted in various strikes, with durations ranging from weeks to months over the decades. These strikes, documented from 1992 to 2022, have had a considerable impact on the education system. Adavbiele (2015) argues that these disruptions have adversely affected practical skills, attitudes, and knowledge related to occupations in different sectors of economic and social life.

The frequent strikes have particularly impacted technical education students who are required to demonstrate proficiency in technical skills upon completion. The alteration of academic calendars to accommodate strikes disrupts the teaching and learning processes, leading to elongated school years and rushed curriculum coverage. This rush contributes to a poorer mastery of the profession. Additionally, the strikes negatively affect the availability and functionality of equipment and facilities crucial for teaching and learning, further exacerbating the consequences of ASUU-FGN disputes (NUC, 2001-2011; Esenwa, 2013; Egbebi and Iheriohamma, 2018).

According to Ochonu (2019), the golden age of ASUU's struggle concluded approximately 20 years ago. In the subsequent years, the union has grappled with the challenge of redefining itself and establishing a new identity. However, rather than adopting innovative approaches suited to the contemporary university system, Ochonu asserts that ASUU has

merely been reinventing traditional strategies, particularly relying on periodic strikes. He criticizes the union for what he sees as laziness and a lack of imagination, emphasizing that the once-effective tactic of strikes in the 1980s and 1990s has become increasingly counterproductive in the current landscape. Ochonu contends that ASUU's problems stem from a tendency to resort to strikes every five years, relying on what he characterizes as propaganda to garner sympathy from parents, students, and the general public. Specifically, he questions the validity of the 2009 agreement renegotiated in 2013, highlighting the term "poor funding" as vague, misleading, and a recurring theme in ASUU's rhetorical repertoire (Ochonu, 2019).

Ojeifor (2014) argues that the impact of ASUU-FGN disputes, particularly the reliance on strikes, raises questions about the effectiveness of this approach and the absence of alternative means for resolving disagreements with the federal government. Ojeifor emphasizes the need for alternative solutions to prevent further deterioration of the university system and prolonged idleness for Nigerian university students. He points out that the socio-economic costs of these strike actions are immeasurable, with detrimental effects on the educational sector and the nation at large. One of the significant negative effects highlighted by Ojeifor is the adverse impact on the quality of graduates, as extended disruptions lead to less time for students to complete their degrees. The consequences are particularly felt by final-year students who may struggle to graduate on time, affecting those pursuing careers in law or medicine. Ojeifor underscores the ripple effect of these disruptions, leading to a standstill in the academic progress of the nation's students (Ojeifor, 2014).

Ochonu (2014) points out additional negative effects and impacts of ASUU-FGN disputes, including the frequent disruptions and impairment of universities, resulting in a tarnished image for Nigerian higher education institutions. The financial implications are significant, with a loss of revenue as students refrain from paying fees during periods of unrest. Moreover, the disruption prompts some students to seek education in neighboring African countries like Ghana, Cameroon, Benin, and Togo. One of the most perilous consequences highlighted by Ochonu is the potential engagement of students in anti-social activities due to prolonged periods of idleness. He emphasizes the proverb that an idle brain is the workshop of the devil, underscoring the importance of addressing the negative impact on students' behavior during extended university strikes (Ochonu, 2014).

ASUU – FGN DISPUTES; THE POSITIVE IMPACT

The ASUU-FGN disputes and consequent strikes have incurred significant costs for the nation, although some argue that these conflicts have brought public universities into the limelight. According to Oyewunmi and Oyewunmi (2017), the union's tenacity and persistent

engagements with successive governments have granted it visibility, a sense of permanence, entitlement, and recognition. This, in turn, has seemingly elevated the union's status. Oyewunmi and Oyewunmi (2017) propose that ASUU's characteristics align with the principles of the stakeholder theory, emphasizing its genuine interest and concern for the overall development of Nigeria's public universities. In this understanding, ASUU is seen as intricately linked to the social milieu and cannot exist in isolation. Therefore, the government, which established these institutions by law, is deemed responsible for creating an enabling environment that contributes to both short and long-term advantages across various sectors of the Nigerian economy.

Chigozie (2017) contends that since the 1980s, ASUU has actively engaged with federal and state governments to reposition the Nigerian university system for effective delivery. An important development in this context is the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), formerly known as the Education Trust Fund (ETF), which emerged in response to a challenge posed by the government in the early 1990s. TETFund has played a significant role in supporting tertiary education by sponsoring academic staff for advanced degrees, funding conferences, workshops, and valuable research initiatives (ASUU, 2013; Nein, 2023). Furthermore, in response to ASUU's call in the FGN/ASUU agreement of 2009 to revitalize public universities to meet national and international standards, the federal government constituted the Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigeria Public Universities (CNANU) in 2012, followed by the Implementation Monitoring Committee (IMC) in 2014. These initiatives have resulted in the positive impact of the Needs Assessment Interventions Fund for Nigerian public universities, contributing to improved facilities, conducive learning environments, and staff training and development (Chigozie, 2017).

Wages and salary administration in Nigeria have been shaped by the influence of various trade disputes, with ASUU, in particular, playing a crucial role for academic staff in Nigerian universities (Aqbunu, 2012; Chigozie, 2017). Recognizing the unique role of academics and aiming to curb brain drain, the government has implemented special conditions of service for them, seeking to motivate academics comparable to their counterparts worldwide. The university salary structure, as commended by ASUU, has witnessed significant increases in basic pay (Aqburu, 2012). In addition to basic pay, various allowances are provided to academic staff, including those for postgraduate supervision/field trips, honorariums for external/internal examiners (postgraduate thesis), external moderation of undergraduate and postgraduate examinations, postgraduate study grants, and other allowances such as external assessment of readers and professorial call duty, clinical hazard, responsibility, and earned academic allowances (Chigozie, 2017).

In fact, ASUU-FGN disputes and establishment of TETFund has improved physical infrastructural, project maintenance, TETFund scholarship, Equipment fabrication entrepreneurship, Journal publication, manual scribe development, ICT support advocacy Institution based Research, national research and labour development (Bogoro, 2019)

CONCLUSION

The cat and mouse relationship between FGN and ASUU or the soured relationship is traced to the early 1980 and the intolerant behaviour by almost all successive governments in the genuine demands of ASUU or hide ASUU it, sees a passionate feeling of distrust of government policies and the wastages, corrupt behaviour and insist that government must do things to resuscitate ailing Nigerian public universities. All side operates diametrically opposed ideologically.

It is germane to acknowledge that the gorilla strike tactics has immensely saved the Nigerian public universities to the present state, without persistent effort of ASUU universities in Nigeria would have been moribund. It is true disputes, but the disagreement between FGN and ASUU has greatly impaction quality of learning, infrastructural development, academic staff quality in all universities, increases in wages remuneration of academic staff and better learning environment for students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Unless ASUU is also involved in the installment of responsible government, the struggle between FGN and ASUU shall continue, since they are the electoral returning officers of states and local government in Nigeria.
2. ASUU must devise more means for their struggle, especially the strategy of guerrilla war strike tactics. You strike stay a little and withdraw, so they the university system will not collapse and they the government will take their children to private universities. Since strike is the only language the Nigerian government can understand.
3. Government must and should adhere to the demand for adequate funding of universities in line with the UNESCO 26% budgeting for universities.
4. Improve conditions of learning for students are and government must show good faith in education, as the bed rock of all nations.
5. Those in the academics is involved in contesting elections, and vying for positions and possibly struggle to take over the leadership of Nigerian government. If not, the future is bleak.

6. Government and the ruling elites see education as the bedrock of development of any country. With sound educational institutions, a nation is as good as made, as the institutions will turn out all rounded manpower to continue with the development of the society drive by well thought out ideas, policies, programmes and projects.
7. States and federal government should uphold the virtues and attributes, education and offset the challenges, and avoid lip service and total abandonment of the National Policy on Education and Fundamental Objectives and directives principle of state policy as it is on education and the institution.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The scope of this study is on ASUU-FGN dispute, especially Universities in South South, Nigeria. Further research is required in this study, to go beyond this scope of the study to cover universities in other regions of Nigeria, the West, East and the North and the world to be able to make generalizations that ASUU-FGN disputes has negative and positive impact on universities in Nigeria.

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