



<https://doi.10.5281/zenodo.15065893>

Labour Union Strikes and the Performance of Public Universities in Nigeria: A Study of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Nnamdi Azikiwe University Chapter, Awka

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ABSTRACT

Globally, universities are fundamental to the development of human capital, innovation, and economic growth and Nigeria is not in exception but a lot of challenges such as persistent, complex and multifaceted labour union strikes in higher institutions is impacting not only on the institutions, students, faculties, the broader society but at the same time have repercussions on the performance of universities, leading to disrupted academic calendars, delayed graduations, and compromised educational quality. Labour union strikes has been a strong treat to educational development and a stumbling block to effective learning in the Nigerian institute of higher learning most especially in the universities. This study explores the multifaceted effects of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strikes on academic staff, on academic performance of students, on the overall university performance both in Nigeria and beyond among others. The study anchored on Conflict Theory of Karl Marx (1818–1883), which posits that societal changes occur when oppressed groups challenge established power structures, resulting in realignments in relationships. The theory provides insights into how conflicts over inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and unsatisfactory working conditions highlight power struggles within the higher education system leading to the tensions on university performance, including academic disruptions and the erosion of institutional credibility. The decisions made today will influence the Federal Government and university stakeholders to establish a robust conflict resolution mechanism to address grievances before they escalate into industrial actions. Government should prioritize the welfare of academic staff by ensuring prompt payment of salaries, providing research grants, and funding professional development programs, improve the general conditions of the ASUU members for the betterment of the university performance.

Keywords: Labour Union, Strikes, Labour Union Strikes, Performance and Public Universities

INTRODUCTION

Labour unions play a critical role in advocating for workers' rights, fair wages, and improved working conditions, and they have become integral components of various sectors worldwide. The

impact of labour unions, particularly in the education sector, is a subject of significant interest due to their influence on academic environments, policies, and institutional governance. Globally, universities are fundamental to the development of human capital, innovation, and economic growth. Labour unions, such as the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the United States and the University and College Union (UCU) in the United Kingdom, have historically engaged in industrial actions, including strikes, to negotiate better terms for their members (Gindin, 2020). However, these strikes often have repercussions on the performance of universities, leading to disrupted academic calendars, delayed graduations, and compromised educational quality (Ehrenberg & Klaff, 2019). The effects of labour union strikes in higher education are complex and multifaceted, impacting not only on the institution but also students, faculty, and the broader society.

In developing countries, particularly in Africa, the dynamics of labour union strikes in public universities present unique challenges. The education systems in these regions are often characterized by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and unstable political climates, which exacerbate the effects of strikes. In many African countries, public universities depend heavily on government funding, making them particularly vulnerable to fiscal constraints and policy shifts. Strikes by academic staff unions are frequently triggered by demands for better salaries, improved working conditions, and adequate funding for universities. For instance, in South Africa, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) has repeatedly engaged in strikes, significantly affecting academic activities and institutional performance (Cele & Koen, 2019). Similarly, in Kenya, the University Academic Staff Union (UASU) has held several strikes in recent years, resulting in substantial disruptions to academic programs and institutional governance (Muthee, 2021).

In Nigeria, the effect of labour union strikes on the performance of public universities is a particularly pressing issue, given the recurring industrial actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Since its formation in 1978, ASUU has become one of the most powerful and influential labour unions in Nigeria, consistently advocating for improved funding, better working conditions, and fair remuneration for university staff (Okolie, 2020). Over the years, ASUU has embarked on several nationwide strikes, often in response to the government's failure to meet its demands regarding the revitalization of public universities. The frequent strikes have had profound implications for the Nigerian higher education system, including the disruption of academic calendars, delays in student graduations, reduced university performance, and a decline in the quality of education (Obasi, 2021). For example, a study by Obasi (2021) indicates that between 1999 and 2020, ASUU embarked on more than 15 nationwide strikes, totaling approximately 1,500 days of academic disruption. These disruptions have resulted in significant setbacks in academic research, teaching, and learning processes, ultimately affecting the international reputation of Nigerian universities.

The impact of ASUU strikes on the performance of public universities in Nigeria can be traced to multiple factors, including inadequate government funding, poor remuneration, poor infrastructure, and a lack of adherence to agreements reached between ASUU and the federal government. According to Adedeji and Folarin (2020), one of the primary reasons for the persistent strikes by ASUU is the government's failure to honor various agreements concerning the funding and administration of public universities. The effects of these strikes are multifaceted and include a decline in student enrollment,

prolonged academic sessions, loss of academic staff to foreign institutions, and the overall deterioration of academic standards (Adedeji & Folarin, 2020). Furthermore, the prolonged absence of students and lecturers from the university environment during strikes often leads to a loss of motivation and morale, further compounding the challenges facing Nigerian public universities (Adeyemi & Ekundayo, 2019).

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, like many other public universities in Nigeria, has experienced the adverse effects of these labour union strikes. The institution, established in 1991, has a reputation for academic excellence, research, and innovation. However, it has not been immune to the challenges posed by ASUU strikes. The Nnamdi Azikiwe University chapter of ASUU has frequently participated in nationwide strikes, contributing to the disruption of academic activities and affecting the overall performance of the university. For example, during the 2020 ASUU strike, which lasted for nine months, Nnamdi Azikiwe University witnessed a significant decline in research output, a disruption of the academic calendar, and a loss of funding opportunities for both staff and students (Ifeanyi & Nwokedi, 2021). The repeated disruption of academic activities due to ASUU strikes has also led to delays in the graduation of students, reduced motivation among faculty and staff, and a decline in the university's reputation both nationally and internationally (Ezeokoli, 2020).

The specific effects of ASUU strikes on the performance of Nnamdi Azikiwe University can be understood in several ways. Firstly, strikes lead to the disruption of academic activities, resulting in delays in program completion, loss of academic momentum, and reduced quality of learning. For example, according to Ezeokoli (2020), prolonged strikes have been associated with a decline in student performance, as they cause interruptions in the delivery of lectures, tutorials, and laboratory sessions. Secondly, strikes often result in the brain drain of qualified and experienced lecturers who leave for better opportunities in other institutions, both within and outside Nigeria, thereby affecting the quality of education provided by the university (Ogunyemi & Olufemi, 2022). Thirdly, strikes negatively impact on the university's financial health, as they often lead to reduced funding from both government and private sector partners, resulting in challenges in maintaining infrastructure and delivering quality education (Adedeji & Folarin, 2020). Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort by the government, university management, the society, students and ASUU to find sustainable solutions that balance the interests of all stakeholders and promote a conducive environment for learning, research, and development. It is against this background that the study seeks to examine the effect of labour union strikes on the performance of public universities in Nigeria with a focus on Academic Staff Union of Universities, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Chapter, Awka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual and Theoretical Explanations of Labour Union Strikes

A strike is a deliberate and collective refusal by a group of employees to perform their duties as a means of expressing grievances, enforcing demands, or protesting against perceived injustices in their workplace. This concept has been widely defined by scholars across various disciplines, reflecting its centrality to labor relations and industrial disputes. According to Armstrong (2019), a strike is a temporary stoppage of work by employees aimed at compelling their employer to address specific demands. Such actions often arise from unresolved disputes regarding wages, working conditions, or broader organizational policies. Similarly, Fajana (2016) views a strike as a mechanism for workers to express dissatisfaction with management decisions or policies. This definition underscores the role of strikes as a form of collective bargaining and a tool for redressing power imbalances between employers and employees.

Otobo (2015), defined a strike as an act of withholding labour services, typically as a last resort after negotiations and other dispute resolution mechanisms have failed. This definition emphasizes the procedural nature of strikes, often preceded by failed conciliation efforts or arbitration. It highlights the role of strikes as a strategic tool in labor-management conflicts, driven by the need for leverage during negotiations. In a similar vein, Anugwom (2017) characterizes a strike as a planned and organized cessation of work by a group of employees to influence workplace decisions or policies. This definition underscores the collective nature of strikes and their reliance on worker solidarity to achieve desired outcomes.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defined a strike as a fundamental right of workers, rooted in the principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining. The ILO emphasizes that strikes are a legitimate means for workers to defend their interests, particularly in contexts where alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are ineffective. This perspective broadens the conceptualization of strikes, framing them as both a labor relations tool and a fundamental human right. Similarly, Ejiofor and Obi (2016) highlight the socio-political dimensions of strikes, describing them as a form of protest that transcends workplace grievances to address broader systemic issues, such as governance or public policy. When "strike" is contextualized within labour unions, the concept becomes more specialized, often referred to as "labor union strike." A labor union is an organized group of workers formed to protect and advance their collective interests. Fajana (2015) defined labour unions as voluntary associations of workers established to promote and defend their economic, social, and political interests through collective action. Combining the concepts of labor unions and strikes, a labour union strike can be defined as a work stoppage initiated and coordinated by a labour union to pressurize employers or relevant authorities into meeting workers' demands. According to Adewumi and Fashoyin (2017), labour union strikes represent the ultimate weapon in the arsenal of collective bargaining, symbolizing the unified voice and power of workers in their pursuit of justice and fairness. The Association of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strikes in Nigeria provide a notable example of labour union strikes. ASUU, a labour union of university lecturers in Nigeria, has historically employed strikes as a tool to demand better funding for tertiary education, improved working conditions, and the fulfillment of agreements with the government. For instance, the 2020 ASUU strike, which lasted nine months, was centered on demands for the revitalization of public universities, payment of earned allowances, and implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS). This strike disrupted academic activities nationwide, drawing attention to the chronic underfunding and neglect of the education sector (Egwunyenga, 2021).

When examining strikes within the context of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria, the concept assumes a more specific and contextualized definition. ASUU strikes refer to the industrial actions undertaken by the Academic Staff Union of Universities, a labor union representing academic staff in Nigerian universities, to address grievances and advocate for better working conditions, improved funding of tertiary education, and the fulfillment of agreements reached with the government. ASUU strikes are a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria's educational landscape, shaped by the historical and socio-economic dynamics of the country. As a result, the concept of an ASUU strike is intricately tied to broader discussions on education, governance, and labor relations in Nigeria. ASUU strikes are rooted in the broader definition of strikes but are distinguished by their focus on issues related to higher education and academic staff welfare. According to Aluede et al. (2016), an ASUU strike is a work stoppage by academic staff in public universities to demand the implementation of agreements reached between ASUU and the Nigerian government. This definition highlights the union's commitment to ensuring that tertiary education receives adequate funding and that academic staff are provided with conducive working conditions. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Alonge (2016) define an ASUU strike as a form of protest against the government's failure to fulfill its obligations toward the

university system. This definition underscores the adversarial relationship between ASUU and the government, often marked by distrust and unmet promises.

Chinelo (2020), conceptualizes ASUU strikes as a mechanism for advocating systemic reform in Nigeria's tertiary education sector. This perspective frames ASUU strikes as more than just labor disputes, positioning them as part of a broader struggle to improve the quality and accessibility of higher education in Nigeria. Similarly, Ige (2018) defined ASUU strikes as an organized withdrawal of academic labor aimed at compelling the government to prioritize education funding and policy implementation. This definition situates ASUU strikes within the broader context of Nigeria's underfunded education system and the challenges faced by public universities. ASUU strikes have been described as a reflection of the persistent neglect of education by successive Nigerian governments. According to Olorunsola (2016), ASUU strikes represent the union's response to systemic challenges, including poor infrastructure, irregular payment of salaries, and inadequate research funding. This definition emphasizes the structural and systemic nature of the issues that often trigger ASUU strikes, positioning them as a symptom of deeper governance failures. Similarly, Nwagwu (2019) describes ASUU strikes as a manifestation of the crisis in Nigeria's tertiary education sector, rooted in decades of underinvestment and policy inconsistencies. The concept of an ASUU strike also incorporates the notion of solidarity and collective action among academic staff. As Okebukola (2015) notes, ASUU strikes are characterized by a high level of coordination and unity among members, reflecting the union's commitment to collective bargaining principles. This definition highlights the organizational strength of ASUU and its ability to mobilize members across the country in pursuit of shared goals. Similarly, Onuoha (2016) describes ASUU strikes as a testament to the union's resilience and determination to advocate for the interests of its members and the broader academic community.

Performance

Performance is a concept that has been widely discussed and defined across various disciplines, each offering a unique perspective based on the context in which it is applied. In general, performance refers to the ability to achieve predefined goals or standards within a given framework of activities. According to Armstrong (2020), performance is the accomplishment of tasks measured against preset standards of accuracy, completeness, cost, and speed. This definition emphasizes a results-oriented view, where outcomes are assessed in relation to specific benchmarks. Similarly, Neely et al. (2022) conceptualize performance as the execution of actions and the achievement of outcomes, suggesting a dual focus on both processes and results.

The concept of performance is also linked to efficiency and effectiveness, which are critical in organizational settings. Richard et al. (2019) defined performance as the ability of an entity to achieve its goals in an efficient and effective manner. Efficiency refers to the optimal use of resources to achieve objectives, while effectiveness is the degree to which desired outcomes are achieved. This distinction underscores the multidimensional nature of performance, which encompasses both qualitative and quantitative metrics. Kaplan and Norton (1996) provide a more structured approach by introducing the Balanced Scorecard, which evaluates performance across four perspectives: financial, customer, internal processes, and learning and growth. This framework highlights the need for a holistic view of performance, integrating various dimensions to provide a comprehensive assessment.

In the context of education, performance takes on a more nuanced meaning. For instance, Obadara and Alaka (2016) defined educational performance as the extent to which educational institutions achieve their academic, administrative, and societal objectives. This definition extends beyond academic achievements to include the institution's role in fostering societal development and addressing community needs. Educational performance is often measured using indicators such as

student outcomes, research output, staff quality, and institutional reputation, reflecting the diverse functions of educational institutions.

When examining the performance of public universities in Nigeria, it is essential to integrate these general definitions into the specific context of higher education in the country. Public universities in Nigeria are government-funded institutions established to provide accessible and quality education, conduct research, and contribute to national development. Their performance, therefore, must be conceptualized in terms of their ability to fulfill these mandates. Olayemi (2015) described the performance of public universities as the capacity of these institutions to deliver quality education, produce competent graduates, and contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation. This definition aligns with the broader understanding of performance while situating it within the specific goals of public universities.

The performance of public universities in Nigeria is also closely linked to their governance structures and resource management. Akpan (2017) defined the performance of public universities as the effectiveness and efficiency with which these institutions utilize available resources to achieve academic excellence, promote research, and foster innovation. This perspective emphasizes the importance of resource optimization, particularly in the face of challenges such as underfunding and inadequate infrastructure, which are prevalent in Nigerian public universities. Furthermore, it highlights the role of governance in ensuring that institutional policies and practices align with performance objectives.

In addition to governance and resource management, the performance of public universities in Nigeria is often evaluated based on their contributions to societal development. Okebukola (2016) conceptualized the performance of public universities as their ability to address national priorities through education, research, and community engagement. This definition underscores the societal expectations placed on public universities, which are not only academic institutions but also agents of social change and economic development. For example, their performance may be assessed based on the employability of graduates, the impact of research on policy and industry, and the effectiveness of community outreach programs.

The assessment of the performance of public universities in Nigeria also involves examining their ability to adapt to changing societal and global demands. Ajayi et al. (2021) argued that the performance of public universities should be viewed in terms of their responsiveness to emerging trends such as globalization, technological advancement, and the demand for inclusive and equitable education. This perspective highlights the dynamic nature of performance, which requires continuous innovation and adaptation to maintain relevance and effectiveness. In synthesizing these various conceptual definitions, the performance of public universities in Nigeria can be understood as a multidimensional construct that encompasses academic excellence, resource optimization, governance, societal impact, and adaptability to change. It involves the effective and efficient delivery of quality education, the production of research that addresses national and global challenges, and the ability to foster innovation and development. This conceptualization aligns with the broader definitions of performance while addressing the unique characteristics and challenges of public universities in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Conflict Theory which was propounded by Karl Marx in 1818-1883. The Conflict Theory is sociological framework that views society as an arena of inequality and perpetual struggle between groups competing for scarce resources. Marx argued that the structure of capitalist societies inherently creates class divisions, with the bourgeoisie (owners of production)

exploiting the proletariat (working class) for economic gain. This exploitation leads to a conflict of interests, as the ruling class seeks to maintain its dominance while the working-class fights for equity and improved conditions. Marx believed this struggle would eventually culminate in revolutionary change, leading to a more egalitarian society. The relevance of Conflict Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain the underlying causes of strikes as a manifestation of systemic tensions between academic staff and governing authorities. In the context of ASUU strikes, the theory provides insights into how conflicts over inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and unsatisfactory working conditions highlight power struggles within the higher education system. By applying Conflict Theory, this study can analyze the impact of these tensions on university performance, including academic disruptions and the erosion of institutional credibility

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis method was employed to illustrate the relationships which exist between the dependent and independent variables. The researchers reviewed and analyzed more than 54 literatures to establish the nexus between labour union strikes and the Performance of Public Universities in Nigeria. The main goal of the researchers in the descriptive study is to accurately and effectively describe the impacts of labour union strikes on the performance of public universities, analyzing critical issues and evaluating strategic choices for the future and understanding the issue under investigation. Secondary sources of data were completely relied upon in the study which was sourced from academics' literature on the subject matter.

Challenges and Effects of Labour Union Strikes on the Performance of Public Universities

Ideally, public universities in Nigeria are expected to function as centers of academic excellence, fostering quality education, research, and innovation while contributing to national development. In such an environment, academic staff are provided with adequate remuneration, resources, and conducive working conditions that allow them to effectively perform their duties and achieve high standards of teaching and research. Labour unions, such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) play a collaborative role in advocating for sustainable improvements in higher education policies and practices without frequent resorting to industrial actions. The harmonious relationship between university management, staff unions, and the government ensure uninterrupted academic calendars, timely graduations, high student satisfaction, and a global reputation for excellence in education and research.

Contrary to this above ideal, the reality in Nigerian public universities is markedly different. Recurrent strikes by ASUU, especially at institutions like Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, have become a common occurrence due to unresolved disputes over issues such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, poor remuneration, unpaid salaries, and failure of the government to honor agreements. These strikes have led to frequent disruptions of academic activities, delays in student graduation, reduced staff morale, and an overall decline in the quality of education offered by these institutions. For instance, ASUU's nationwide strike in 2020 lasted for nine months, causing significant disruptions to the academic calendar and resulting in substantial losses in both teaching and research outputs (Ifeanyi & Nwokedi, 2021). The persistent nature of these strikes has created a climate of instability and uncertainty, which not only affects the immediate universities but also erodes public confidence in Nigeria's higher education system.

This situation has serious implications for the performance of public universities in Nigeria. The frequent strikes have led to a decline in academic standards, as prolonged disruptions impact on student learning, delay research activities, and contribute to the brain drain of talented academics who seek better opportunities elsewhere as was indicated by Ogunyemi and Olufemi (2022). The literature reveals a significant gap in understanding the specific effects of these strikes on the performance of

individual universities, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and how they differ from the broader national context. While several studies have explored the causes of ASUU strikes and their general impact on Nigerian education, there is a paucity of research focusing on the specific effects on university performance at a local level, particularly concerning academic outcomes, staff productivity, and institutional reputation.

The effect of strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on the academic performance of students in public universities in Nigeria is a topic of significant concern, with numerous implications for students, institutions, and the broader education sector. ASUU strikes have become a recurrent feature of the Nigerian public university system, often resulting from unresolved disputes over funding, salaries, and other issues between the federal government and the union. These strikes disrupt the academic calendar, leading to prolonged academic sessions, delayed graduations, and diminished academic outcomes for students.

One major effect of ASUU strikes is the disruption of academic continuity. Regular academic engagement is critical for students to grasp and retain knowledge effectively. When strikes occur, the interruption of academic activities breaks this continuity, forcing students to abandon their studies for an indeterminate period. Research has shown that such interruptions lead to a loss of academic momentum, with students often finding it difficult to reconnect with their studies when activities resume (Adewumi, 2021). This is particularly detrimental in disciplines requiring consistent practice and study, such as engineering, medicine, and law. The psychological toll of uncertainty further compounds the difficulty, as students are left in limbo without clarity on when the strike will end.

Another significant impact is the erosion of student morale and motivation. Prolonged strikes create a sense of frustration and hopelessness among students, who feel their academic and career aspirations are being undermined by circumstances beyond their control. This frustration is exacerbated by the realization that their peers in private universities or institutions abroad are making uninterrupted progress in their academic pursuits. The resultant demoralization often manifests in reduced commitment to studies and lower academic performance when activities eventually resume (Eze & Anene, 2020). In some cases, students may abandon their education altogether, seeking alternative paths such as entrepreneurship or migration.

The academic performance of students is also adversely affected by the extended gaps in learning caused by ASUU strikes. Studies have highlighted that long breaks from academic activities lead to a decline in retention and understanding of previously taught material (Ige, 2019). This phenomenon, often referred to as "academic atrophy," forces students to relearn much of what they had previously studied, further delaying their progress. The compressed academic schedules implemented to make up for lost time also contribute to poor learning outcomes. Lecturers are often forced to rush through the syllabus, leaving students with insufficient time to grasp complex concepts and engage in meaningful study.

The financial implications of ASUU strikes cannot be overlooked, as they indirectly affect students' academic performance. Many students rely on part-time jobs or financial support from family members to sustain themselves during their university education. Prolonged strikes often lead to a depletion of financial resources, as students must bear the cost of extended accommodation, feeding, and other expenses due to the lengthened academic calendar (Ogundipe et al., 2022). For some students, this financial strain translates into an inability to purchase necessary learning materials or even attend classes when academic activities eventually resume, further compromising their academic performance.

ASUU strikes also contribute to a culture of apathy and reduced academic engagement among students.

The uncertainty surrounding the resumption of academic activities often pushes students to seek alternative engagements, such as part-time work or informal vocational training. While these activities

may provide short-term benefits, they divert students' attention from their studies and diminish their academic focus. Upon resumption, students may find it difficult to reintegrate into academic life, resulting in lower levels of participation and performance (Akinyemi & Adedeji, 2018). Furthermore, the irregularity of academic calendars caused by strikes discourages students from making long-term academic plans, leading to a lack of commitment to academic excellence.

The psychological impact of ASUU strikes on students cannot be overstated. The uncertainty and anxiety caused by prolonged strikes often lead to mental health challenges, including stress, depression, and a lack of self-worth. These psychological burdens affect students' cognitive abilities and concentration, reducing their capacity to excel academically (Nwankwo, 2023). Moreover, the frustration associated with interrupted academic activities often leads to an increase in anti-social behaviors among students, such as substance abuse, cultism, and other forms of delinquency, further undermining their academic performance.

Beyond the individual student, ASUU strikes also erode the overall quality of education in public universities. The repeated interruption of academic activities lowers the standard of teaching and learning, as lecturers are often rushed to complete the syllabus, leaving little room for in-depth learning or research (Okonkwo & Eze, 2020). This decline in academic rigor is reflected in the poor performance of Nigerian students in international examinations and competitions. Additionally, the strikes damage the reputation of public universities, reducing their appeal to prospective students and discouraging talented individuals from pursuing academic careers.

While the immediate impact of ASUU strikes on students' academic performance is evident, the long-term effects are equally troubling. Graduates from public universities affected by repeated strikes often enter the labor market with diminished skills and knowledge, making them less competitive compared to their peers from private institutions or universities in other countries. This has broader implications for national development, as the quality of human capital produced by Nigerian universities is a critical determinant of the country's socio-economic progress. Efforts to mitigate the impact of ASUU strikes on students' academic performance must address the root causes of these disruptions. Improved funding for public universities, prompt payment of lecturers' salaries, and the implementation of agreements between the federal government and ASUU are essential to restoring stability to the university system. Additionally, universities should explore alternative modes of learning, such as online and blended learning, to ensure academic activities can continue during strikes. These measures, combined with a commitment to resolving disputes amicably, can help minimize the frequency and impact of strikes on students' academic performance. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strikes have had significant effects on academic staff in public universities across Nigeria. These strikes, which arise primarily from disputes between the union and the government over funding, remuneration, and working conditions, have implications for the personal and professional lives of university lecturers. As key stakeholders in the education sector, academic staff face diverse challenges due to these prolonged industrial actions.

One of the critical effects of ASUU strikes on academic staff is financial instability. Many lecturers depend solely on their salaries, which are often withheld during strike periods due to the "no work, no pay" policy implemented by the government. This financial hardship affects their ability to meet basic needs, fulfill family obligations, and invest in personal and professional development. Studies have shown that such financial difficulties lead to heightened stress levels and a decrease in morale among academic staff (Onyekwena & Olomola, 2019). In addition, the lack of timely payment of wages disrupts savings plans and retirement preparations, leaving many lecturers in precarious financial situations. Beyond financial issues, the strikes significantly impact the professional productivity and academic development of university staff. Extended strike periods lead to disruptions in academic calendars, forcing lecturers to compress course content and teaching schedules when

academic activities resume. This often compromises the quality of education and affects lecturers' ability to deliver comprehensive lectures and assessments. According to Adeyemi and Oladayo (2020), the repeated interruptions caused by ASUU strikes result in a lack of continuity in research activities, delaying the completion of ongoing research projects and publication of scholarly works. These disruptions can hinder lecturers' career progression, especially for those seeking promotions which are often tied to research output. The strikes also contribute to psychological stress and emotional strain among academic staff. The uncertainty surrounding the resolution of disputes between ASUU and the government creates an atmosphere of tension and anxiety. Many lecturers worry about the long-term implications of strikes on their careers, job security, and the reputation of their institutions. As Ezeanya and Okoro (2021) note, prolonged strikes foster feelings of frustration, helplessness, and dissatisfaction, which can culminate in burnout and reduced job commitment. This emotional toll not only affects individual lecturers but also impacts on their ability to engage effectively with students and colleagues.

Another significant effect of ASUU strikes is the erosion of public confidence in the Nigerian university system. Academic staff, as custodians of knowledge, often bear the brunt of criticism from students, parents, and the general public, who view them as complicit in the system's instability. This loss of trust can be demoralizing for lecturers, many of whom are committed to their profession despite the challenges they face. The negative perception of the university system also limits opportunities for collaboration with international academic institutions, further isolating Nigerian lecturers from the global academic community (Ibrahim & Mohammed, 2022). ASUU strikes have also spurred some lecturers to seek alternative sources of income or opportunities outside academia. Faced with financial uncertainty and dissatisfaction with their working conditions, many academic staff engage in consultancy, part-time teaching, or other entrepreneurial ventures. While these activities provide temporary financial relief, they often divert attention and energy away from core academic responsibilities. Some lecturers have even opted to migrate to countries with better working conditions and opportunities, contributing to the brain drain that undermines Nigeria's higher education system (Odeyemi & Akinwale, 2018). This loss of experienced and skilled professionals exacerbates the challenges faced by public universities, further reducing their capacity to deliver quality education. Despite these negative impacts, ASUU strikes have also had some unintended positive effects on academic staff. The strikes provide opportunities for collective bargaining and solidarity among lecturers, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. Through these industrial actions, academic staff have been able to secure some improvements in salaries, allowances, and infrastructure, albeit temporarily. As Nwagwu and Adebayo (2020) observe, the strikes have also drawn national and international attention to the systemic underfunding of Nigerian universities, prompting some stakeholders to advocate for reforms in the education sector.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike has had profound effects on infrastructural development and maintenance in public universities in Nigeria, as the recurring industrial actions often disrupt the system's functionality and delay critical projects. ASUU, established to advocate for the welfare of academic staff and the improvement of public university systems, frequently engages in strikes to protest inadequate funding, poor salaries, and failure to implement agreements by the government (Abraham, 2021). While these strikes aim to address systemic issues, they inadvertently impact on the infrastructure of universities, leading to stagnation or deterioration of facilities necessary for academic activities.

One of the most direct effects of ASUU strikes on infrastructural development is the delay in the execution of ongoing construction projects. When academic staff down tools, administrative processes often slow down significantly. This slowdown affects the disbursement of funds for capital projects, supervision of construction, and communication with contractors, leaving many projects abandoned or delayed indefinitely (Okeke & Chukwuma, 2020). For example, several federal

universities across Nigeria have experienced extended delays in completing lecture halls, hostels, and laboratories during prolonged strikes, which hampers the ability of these institutions to meet the growing demands of student populations.

Moreover, maintenance of existing infrastructure is severely compromised during ASUU strikes. Strikes often result in the closure of universities for extended periods, during which maintenance activities are neglected. The absence of staff and students means routine inspections and repairs are deferred, leading to rapid deterioration of facilities (Adamu, 2019). For instance, laboratory equipment left unused during strikes often becomes damaged due to poor handling or exposure to unfavorable environmental conditions, and classroom buildings deteriorate due to a lack of upkeep. The financial resources that could have been allocated for proactive maintenance are redirected to cover other pressing needs once the strike ends, exacerbating the issue of infrastructural decay.

The frequent disruptions caused by ASUU strikes also discourage investment in public university infrastructure. Both local and international donors, as well as public-private partnerships, are often reluctant to invest in a system plagued by instability (Onyeonoru, 2019). This lack of external funding reduces the capacity of universities to expand or upgrade their facilities to meet global standards. In contrast, private universities, which are not affected by such strikes, tend to attract more investments and donations for infrastructural development, widening the gap between public and private institutions in Nigeria.

Another critical dimension of the impact of ASUU strikes is the effect on government budgeting and funding priorities for university infrastructure. Recurrent strikes often lead to renegotiations between ASUU and the federal government, which sometimes result in the allocation of funds to meet ASUU's demands. While these negotiations occasionally secure additional funding for university development, the unpredictable nature of such agreements often means that funds are not adequately or consistently disbursed (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022). As a result, infrastructural development projects in public universities are either underfunded or abandoned altogether, perpetuating the cycle of inadequate facilities. The prolonged absence of academic activities during ASUU strikes also negatively affects the morale of stakeholders, including students, parents, and university administrators, which indirectly impacts infrastructure. Students, for instance, may resort to vandalism or unauthorized use of facilities during strikes, causing further damage to already strained infrastructure. Additionally, university administrators, who bear the brunt of managing institutions during and after strikes, often focus on restoring academic stability rather than prioritizing infrastructural improvements (Adedoyin et al., 2020).

The strikes also affect the ability of universities to generate internal revenue, which is often used to supplement government funding for infrastructure. During prolonged strikes, revenue streams such as tuition fees, fees for short courses, and other commercial ventures run by universities are significantly reduced or completely halted (Ojo & Oladipo, 2021). This reduction in revenue further limits the capacity of universities to invest in infrastructural development or maintenance. The cumulative effect is that public universities are left with dilapidated facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate learning environments, all of which undermine the quality of education offered.

In addition to physical infrastructure, ASUU strikes also impact on the technological infrastructure of public universities. The increasing reliance on digital tools and platforms for learning and administration necessitates constant upgrades and maintenance of ICT facilities. However, during strikes, these systems are often left unattended, leading to software obsolescence, hardware breakdowns, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities (Eze et al., 2021). This situation is particularly problematic given the global push towards digitalization in higher education, leaving Nigerian public universities lagging behind their counterparts in other countries. While the ASUU strikes aim to draw attention to the chronic underfunding of Nigerian universities, they paradoxically exacerbate the very

infrastructural challenges they seek to address. The absence of a stable academic calendar and the constant interruption of administrative processes undermine long-term planning and the efficient execution of development projects. Moreover, the repeated cycles of strikes and negotiations create an atmosphere of uncertainty, making it difficult for university administrators to prioritize infrastructural development over short-term operational needs (Onuoha, 2023). To mitigate the negative effects of ASUU strikes on infrastructural development and maintenance, a holistic approach is required. The government must honor agreements reached with ASUU to prevent recurring strikes, and there should be a shift towards long-term strategic planning for university funding. Additionally, innovative funding mechanisms such as endowments, alumni contributions, and partnerships with private organizations should be explored to complement government allocations. University administrators must also prioritize routine maintenance during and after strikes to prevent further deterioration of facilities. Furthermore, creating policies that ensure minimal disruption to critical infrastructural projects during strikes could help mitigate their impact.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the effects of ASUU strikes on the performance of public universities in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. ASUU strikes have significantly impact on the academic performance of students, the productivity and morale of academic staff, and the infrastructural development and maintenance of the university. These disruptions undermine the quality of education, hinder professional growth, and exacerbate infrastructure deficits, all of which pose significant challenges to achieving the objectives of public universities in Nigeria. The study therefore concludes that ASUU strikes have a profound and negative impact on the performance of public universities in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Minimizing strikes to enhance academic performance: The Federal Government and university stakeholders should establish a robust conflict resolution mechanism to address grievances before they escalate into industrial actions. Regular dialogue and timely implementation of agreements with ASUU will help prevent strikes and ensure uninterrupted academic calendars, which are crucial for maintaining and improving student performance.
2. Improving conditions for academic staff: The government should prioritize the welfare of academic staff by ensuring prompt payment of salaries, providing research grants, and funding professional development programs. Creating an enabling work environment will enhance job satisfaction, boost morale, and improve the productivity of lecturers, thereby contributing to better academic outcomes.
3. Sustaining infrastructural development: Dedicated funds for infrastructural development and maintenance should be shielded from disruptions caused by strikes. The government and university management should explore public-private partnerships (PPPs) to fund and maintain critical infrastructure. Additionally, periodic infrastructure audits should be conducted to identify and address pressing maintenance needs.

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