

Strikes in Nigeria Higher Education: An Appraisal

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The history of Higher education in Nigeria cannot be told without the inclusion of events and periods of strikes. Strikes of various natures and of different reasons have become a normal phenomenon in growing inconsiderate policy making relationship between the government and academia. Though it is stipulated in the constitution that strikes can be used as avenues to express public opinion which can bring positive changes, yet the institutions of higher education are depleting and reducing despite the strikes, policies, money, corruption, knowledge and human resources that are put into it. The standard and products of Nigeria's higher education are getting lower despite highly improved inputs and this situation is mirrored effectively in the Nigerian economy. This paper reviews the incidents of strikes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria towards understanding the what, how and why of these strike. The effects of these strike actions on the university, local economy and Nigerian economy will also be outlined.

Historical research methodology was adopted for this study. Further, primary and secondary sources would be used to provide more information. This study concludes that though higher education in Nigeria has always outlived strikes, with cumulating impacts, future strikes would devalue, to the lowest minimum, the standard of education in the country. It therefore recommends the structures should be placed by stake holders adopted in the constitution to ensure that policy makers, policy implementers and academic bodies collectively make decisions intentionally for the growth of Nigerian higher education. A fool proof system should be developed that would sieve out selfish, political intention from shaping the academic future in Nigeria.

Introduction

The history of Higher education in Nigeria cannot be told without the inclusion of events and periods of strikes. Strikes of various natures and for different reasons have become a normal phenomenon in growing inconsiderate policy making relationship between the government and academia. It is stipulated in the constitution that strikes can be used as avenues to express public opinion which can bring positive changes. However, the institutions of higher education are still facing instability and ills despite the strikes, policies, money, corruption, knowledge and human resources that are put into it. The standard and products of Nigeria's higher education are getting lower despite highly improved inputs and this situation is mirrored effectively in the Nigerian economy. This paper reviews the incidents of strikes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria towards understanding the what, how and why of these strikes. The effects of these strike actions on the university, local economy and Nigerian economy are also investigated.

A Brief History of Higher Education in Nigeria

Higher education is an optional final stage of formal learning that occurs after secondary education. This includes formal learning in College of Education, Seminaries, Institute of Technology, Science, Arts, or Sports, Polytechnics, and Universities. (FGN 2003) Higher education is a higher step in the pursuit of learning, training, professionalism and certification. (Babarinde 2012) The methods of learning in higher education include: lecturing, research, studies, practicum and internship. Higher education trains and educates individuals that go into it. It trains and turns undergraduates into graduates, graduates to postgraduates, Higher education forms professionals, and it certifies individuals for various fields of life both academic and

professionals. It's the factory for the production of the society's educated and professionals. Higher education in various countries is controlled by the government, private individuals or organizations according to the state's policy of education. Higher education in Nigeria started with the colonial masters, who established Institutions such as Yaba higher college in 1932 and set up Elliot's commission on higher education between 1943 and 1945 to report on the organization and facilities of existing centres of higher education in British West Africa and make recommendations regarding future developments in that area. The Second World War had negative impact on the Yaba higher college. There was the withdrawal of lecturers for military call up and reduction in funding. But in July 1947, Dr. K Mellanby arrived Nigeria to resume duty as the principal of the new University College, Ibadan. Yaba College was the nucleus of the new college as 104 students of Yaba moved to Ibadan during the Christmas and on 2nd February, 1948, the University College of Ibadan took off a temporary site in Ibadan. (Babarinde 2012) (Fafunwa 1978) In 1960, the University College became a full fledged University, In 1960 University of Nigeria Nsukka was opened. The year 1962 witnessed the opening of the Universities of Lagos, Ife and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. By 1977-78, seven new Universities were established in Sokoto, Kano, Jos, Ilorin, Port Harcourt, and Calabar. Since then, higher institutions of learning of all types have been established. Today, according to the Nigeria University Commission (NUC) Nigeria has a total of 315 institutions of higher education.

Babarinde observed that indeed we can boast of several Universities formed since Nigeria's independence but analysts have raised the case of growth not development since the myriad of problems confronting our people remain unsolved despite the mandate of institutions of higher education and learning in that regard. These problems includes corruption, politics, lack of

adequate funding, cultism, academic malpractices, strikes and inadequate man power just to mention a few. This study is an attempt at appraising the problem of strikes in Nigerian University Education in order to understand its impacts and effects on the economy.

Strike in Nigerian Institutions of Higher learning

Strikes are defined in this study as a refusal to work organized by a body of employees as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to gain concession from their employer. It is also a form of protest. It is the result of unresolved conflicts between employers and employees (Enomah et al 2010). It can also be described as a situation whereby workers in organization, refuse to work or abandon their work, as a result of disagreement with the management over welfare or other issues. Two kinds of strikes can be noticed in Nigerian institutions of higher learning: the internal and national strikes. Internal strike takes place within an institution; this could be in a university, polytechnic, monotechnic or college of education. Such strike is triggered by factors inherent in each tertiary institution. National strike involves many tertiary institutions. Strike can also be total if staff withdraws their services completely from their places of work. It is partial when staff report at their places of work but refuse to work. It can also be definite or indefinite. Definite strike lasts for a specific period of time (i.e. days, weeks, months or years), while indefinite strike does not have specific time limit. Warning strike lasts for few days and is meant to intimate government or the institution's administration of an intending total strike. (Ige 2014)

Ige further observed that most strikes in higher institutions in Nigeria, are directed at the government in power, (either at state or federal level); few are internal. Strike can also start from a particular higher institution (i.e. as internal) but spread to other institutions and at the end becomes a national strike, if other higher institutions join as a mark of solidarity. National strike

can also become internal strike, if government decides to implement an agreement signed with unions in some institutions but exclude others.

The history of strike in higher institutions in Nigeria dates back to 20th May, 1980, when trade disputes was declared with the Governing Councils of Universities in Nigeria, which demanded for improved funding of the universities, academic freedom, autonomy, as well as the setting up of a special body, to review the conditions of service of the universities' staff. Early in 1992, members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) declared an industrial dispute, over gross underfunding of universities in Nigeria, poor conditions of service of the academic staff, university autonomy, as well as the need for academic freedom. The strike, which was nationwide, lasted for nine months. At the end, ASUU was proscribed while a separate Salary Scale tagged 'University Academic Staff Salary (UASS) was approved by government. This triggered another strike by the Senior Staff Association of Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes and Allied Institutions (SSATHRIAI) and Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) members, which sought parity in salary with the Academic Staff Union (ASUU). In February, 1993, the University Academic Salary Scale (UASS), earlier approved for ASUU members, was cancelled while an Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS) was approved in its replacement. Consequently, The 1993/94 academic session was scrapped in most universities. On 3rd May, 1993, members of ASUU declared another strike, which lasted for five months and challenged the cancellation of the University Academic Salary Scale (UASS). In 1994, ASUU declared another politically motivated strike, which demanded the actualization of June 12, 1993, Presidential Election, won by Chief M.K.O Abiola, as well as proper funding of education. The report of the Monitoring Committee on federal tertiary institutions in Nigeria, in March, 2002, cited in (Obe 2003) indicates that between 1992 and 1999, there were seven strike actions

including industrial strikes, trade dispute, internal strikes, and nationwide strikes. On 22nd June, 2009, the National Executives of ASUU declared a total and indefinite strike, to compel Federal Government to sign the agreement reached with ASUU on the re-negotiation of the June, 2001 FGN-ASUU Agreement. In October, 2010, all the Universities in the Southeast zone of Nigeria embarked on an indefinite strike, where they demanded for the implementation of the agreements signed with ASUU, particularly on salary and allowances. A report in the nation's newspapers also indicated that all the tertiary institutions in Kwara State (one of the 36 States in Nigeria) embarked on a strike, demanding for one hundred percent implementation of the Consolidated Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Salary Structure (CONPCASS) and the Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure (CONTEDISS), effective from January, 2009. Of recent, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) declared a strike over the non-implementation of the agreements reached with Federal Government since year 2000. The strike lasted for almost six months and was suspended during the last week of December, 2013. These are few cases of strikes that occurred in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. (Ige Akindele 2014)

Analysis of the Impact of Strikes in Higher Education in Nigeria

The impact of strikes on higher education in Nigeria is diverse. Several scholars have listed many. Ige observed that incessant strikes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have had negative effects with government, parents, and educational institutions' administrators having their share of the effects. (Ige 2014). Generally, incessant strikes have adverse effect on the economy (Anyawu 2014) these effects include, the suspension of academic activities, and disruptions of academic calendar, conflicts between the government and trade unions, government and academics, corruption, laziness of students, increase in crimes in the society, degrading the

academic profile of Nigeria, loss of jobs, inactive economic activities and delay in registration of graduate students with NYSC, just to mention few.

The physical state of the university is impacted by strikes; University structures and equipment are left without use. Vandals use this time to vandalize university property worth millions and the university is not maintained as workers take part in strike actions. Structures, facilities and environment dilapidate when strike suspends daily maintenance. The image of the university continues to wane before members of the society. Parents become fed up with their ward's inability to complete their education.

Humanly, the impact of strike on the University is great. Strike prevents human resources that work at the university from working. It prevents them from developing in any of the areas of their duty. The human brains that are trained at the university are set loose of every level of culturization. These human brains are students who are forced to go on a break, the end of which these no one can tell as the time for the conflict resolution is never known. The impact of such phenomenon is that the society fails to benefit from the trainers, the human resources and brains which are the students, "When an academic process gets interrupted with strike, all ongoing research get abandoned or delayed; students keep their books in shelves and when the strike is called off, both students and lecturers are mentally weak. "At the end of the day, they graduate with mere certificates instead of knowledge that could impact on the economy. There is a common saying that 'When two elephants fight, the grasses will suffer'. Students have been at the receiving end of strikes in Nigeria". (Enomah et al 2010)

The economy suffers because of the strike. The economy in this study is divided into three: the University economy, the local economy and the state economy. The University economy dwindles as economic activities become inactivates, yet there are even more expenses but no

income. University workers would be paid, electricity, water and security would be paid for, more travels for university officials as they engage in travels for endless negotiations to achieve the aim of going for strike. Strike imposes cost on the employees, the employers and the entire economy. The employees may suffer loss when they are not paid during the strike period. On the part of the employers; cost may be indicated by lost output, lost customers and lost management confidence. (Fashoyin, 1992). This has several adverse effects on the Universities growth and achievements.

The local economy where the university is found and operates, benefits economically from the University. The housing business flourishes as university staff and students hire houses to live in. Markets in this local area benefit as they become the closest point of call for the exchange of goods and services. Small and medium scale enterprises that are established to supply the demands of the individuals that comes to the area because of the university. Strike actions however, bring immediate crippling of the patronage of business and if the duration of the strike extends for a long time, some businesses will fold up. The economic lives of those whose business activities depend on the tertiary institutions for survival are affected.

In case of the state economy, the loss of productivity affects the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This constitutes the most significant quantitative cost to society (Fashoyin, 1992). Instability of the academic calendar has led so many youths to leave the country to study at other countries. Presently so many Nigerian students study abroad and spend so much in order to get a university degree. The researches of the academicians which have the capability to cause an increase in the state to advancement and development are lost within the period of strike. So many scholars lose their jobs; strikes have led to the dismissal and retirement of members of trade unions. In 1985, the management of the University of Benin (one of the universities in Nigeria) dismissed a

former President of ASUU, over his role in the strike in the university and the country as a whole. Forty nine (49) academic staff of University of Ilorin, Nigeria was dismissed in 2001 for taking part in a nationwide strike, embarked upon by members of ASUU (Timilehin et al 2012). The dismissal of staff further aggravates the unemployment crisis in the country and the crime rate, because many among the dismissed individuals often end up in robbery to keep the body and soul together. (Ige 2014)

The societal impacts of strike are many; it affects the family, the nation's image, the government and the quality of education. The family is a basic unit of every society and it represents and reflects the image of everything that is going on in the society. Every family unit desires to see their offspring succeed, get educated and influence the family for good. But strikes of higher education institutions prolong these dreams. The periods of strikes send the students on a break and some them misuse these breaks and get into many ills that distorts their future. Strikes also cause strains on the family relations as students that are expected to be in school come home and become extra responsibilities.

The national image is also smeared by these strikes as they display poverty of leadership responsibility. As the nation gets lock up in unending negotiations of strike with the body that trains and qualifies its literate work force, it casts a shadow of underdevelopment on this country. Over the years, there have been growing concerns about the fall in the standard of education in Nigeria (Okebukola 2002). One factor that can be attributed to this is the incessant strikes and the associated closure of institutions. (Saint et al 2003) All these phenomena affect our country in the scheme of things in the international arena. This strike becomes a reoccurring event with every administration of government; it shows inability on our leaders and our teachers.

The government is also exposed. The major reason for strikes in higher education institutions have always been unfulfilled agreements, lack of adequate academic sponsorship, mismanagement of academic funds, non-payment of staff salaries and obnoxious government policies. These are all leadership challenge that affects us in Nigeria. The citizens both literate and illiterate would not appreciate much any government that allowed its relationship with stake holders in higher education to get into strike. Soon the strike becomes a factor that brings about other problems that become even greater challenge to the government.

An academic institution disrupted with so many strikes cannot produce quality education. The time that is to be spent learn and carrying out research is spent in crisis and conflict, yet strikes take place more than once in every four years. While quoting the verdict of International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Governor of Ekiti State (one of the States in the South West in Nigeria), recently lamented that a sizeable number of graduates in Nigeria are half-baked and unemployable in a formal employment setting. (Ige 2014). This is a case of bad system producing a bad product. This however would continue to be the trend in Nigeria's higher education system as long as strikes continue to disrupt academic calendars and activities. The number of institutions in Nigeria's higher education continue to be on the increase despite the deadly treat of strikes on the system. In 1960, there were just two universities and five collage of education. The federal government and the state governments were previously the only bodies licensed to operate universities. Recently, licenses have been granted to individuals, corporate bodies and religious organizations to establish private universities in the country. Today there over (315) tertiary institutions in Nigeria, private and government inclusive. This shows resilience of our educational sector. But this strength should be well channeled to ensure we get to excellence, as growth does not mean development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our discourse so far shows that the present and the future for higher education in Nigeria will not look bright if strikes continue to be a part of our educational system. Hence, if we are to grow and develop, intentional steps and actions are to be taken by all stake holders. The government should make policies that are dynamic and long lasting. Policies on education should not be left for every government to change; rather every government should build on the policies that have been set before. The minister and commissioners of education should not be chosen unilaterally, rather they should be appointed from a group of senior career educationist and educational administrators. The government should empower higher education commission set up to insure that academic standards and excellence are adhered to all ramifications.

Owners of institutions, investors, administrators and staff should establish institutions based on the outlined Nigeria educational principles. They should ensure they have enough funds to sponsors the institutions they establish, this is to ensure the state of bankruptcy is never reached. The investors should be prudent in their spending and moderate in their profiting. The administrators should have purpose and vision of where they want to steer their institutions to in the future. This purpose and vision should be clearly shared to all educational stakeholders. Affirmative actions should be taken for the actualization of this vision. Staffs should work within the outlined principle of their institutions and the policies of education. They should also work with the understanding that they are training the leaders of the future. They have the responsibility to impact into them what they want the future to be. The Administration and ministries of education should liaise with the department of Institutional Effectiveness which should be established in every institution of higher learning.

Parents, guardians, community and religious leaders should become interested in the affairs of higher education knowing that it is the last stage in the molding process of the working literate persons of our community. Parent teachers meeting should be attended regularly and punctually by parents. They should ensure the meetings are fixed when they can attend. They should be active and attentive in the meeting to ensure they encourage, criticize and enable the institutions leaders to where they ought to be.

Non-governmental actors and organization should have active liaison with institutions of higher learning. Workshops, seminars, internship and research sponsorship and trail should be organized between organizations that would need the products of institution of higher education. The masses should be sensitized on the relevance of quality standard of education in higher education. Finally, all stakeholders in institutions of higher education should ensure that they adapt to certain principles. These principles are definition of mission, a clear construction and drawing of contract, honoring agreements, carrying out individual and corporate responsibility as at when due.

Conclusion

Higher education is the last molding process of the literate human resource of any country. It should not be open to strikes which constantly disrupt this process of preparation. However, so many factors exist in Nigeria that would encourage strike. This study concludes that it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to take active steps to ensure well defined visions; contracts of institutions and Nigeria are undertaken. Institution of Higher education's stakeholders in Nigeria includes every Nigerian.

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