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IMPLICATIONS OF 2022 ASUU STRIKE ON NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The role of university education in the acquisition of knowledge, development and the realization of the economic development of any nation cannot be underestimated. Thus, the quality of public university education acquired is critical to the attainment of economic development. The quality of public university education and incessant Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strikes, with implications for Nigeria's quest for economic development was examined. The study believes that the incessant strikes embarked upon by ASUU has had negative effects on the quality of university education in Nigeria and by extension caused a setback on the nation's quest for economic development. The objectives of the study were to: identify the causes of incessant ASUU strikes in Nigeria's public universities; assess the implications of incessant ASUU strikes for Nigeria's quest for economic development, and suggest possible ways of managing strikes. The findings of the study revealed that loss of national productivity and mass exodus of youths into foreign countries for study constitute part of the implications of poor quality university education for economic development. Consequently, the paper recommends among others the need for legislation that will give legal backing to agreement entered into by the federal government and ASUU.

Keywords: Public Universities, education, ASUU, strike, economic development

Introduction

No doubt, education occupies a prime of place in the developmental effort of any nation. Education according to Anyaogu and Ihebereme (2014) represents the following: one, a medium through which the life of a group of people can be sustained and developed; two, a means of enhancing stability, change and cultural values so as to make a child develop to the full status of a man sound in mind and body; three, to enable the individual obtain the knowledge and skill necessary for a useful life, and finally, to possess standard conduct, become trustworthy by his associates and in the overall be a man of peace, courage and sound judgment.

The major role involves in building university knowledge is determines by the future of individuals and nations towards economic development cannot be downplayed. There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of university education. In an analysis of the roles of university in the present age, Altbach (n.d.) identified these roles to include: national institutions, the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, central academic roles, intellectual centres, access and equity, international institutions, economic development and general education. However, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014, as cited in Mapuranga, 2016) further identified the traditional roles of the university in terms of



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economic growth and development as: increasing productivity, building and attracting talent, meeting employer needs, supporting social mobility. However, despite the central roles of university education to any nation, the public university system in Nigeria has been confronted with so many challenges, the dominant challenge being incessant strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The place of education as a crucial institution of the society remains sacrosanct. However, Cloete, Bailey, Pillay, Bunting and Maaseen's (2011) review of the literature shows that the university unique contribution to development is through knowledge, that is transmitting knowledge to individuals who will go out to the labour market and contribute to society in a variety of ways (teaching), and producing and disseminating knowledge that can lead to innovation or be applied to the problems of society and economy (research, engagement). Hence, Dim, Muogbo and Akpunonu (2017) maintain that nations prioritize and invest in university education because the society expects it to contribute to producing highly skilled personnel in technology, engineering, management and other professions.

Ironically, in recent times, public universities in Nigeria have witnessed incessant closures due to strike actions by the various associations, especially the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Findings have shown that since 2009, ASUU has embarked on at least eight strike actions, leaving a debilitating impact on the tertiary education system and the quality of students it turns out annually. Further enquiries revealed that incessant ASUU strikes are largely due to the failure of the Federal Government to implement

agreements it entered with the union. ASUU was on another round of strike in 2022, which was embarked on for an initial one-month warning strike on February 14, 2022. However, the union has extended the strike several times in since 2021.

Several pressures were mounted by stakeholders such as: parents, the students (through rallies and protests), the Nigeria Labour Congress, and the Civil Society Organisations to enable the Federal Government accede to the demands of the university striking lecturers. However, the then Minister of Labour, Employment and Productivity, Dr. Chris Ngige had stated that the Federal Government does not have the funds to meet its obligations in the agreement signed with ASUU (Punch, 2022). He further said that in an effort to end the ongoing strike by the university lecturers, the government was considering renegotiating the terms of the agreement with ASUU. In a reaction by the ASUU's president, Professor Osodeke described the excuse by the Federal Government as untenable. He stated further: "This is because of several reasons, chief of which is poor management of the economy. This has given rise to leakages in the revenue of governments at all levels. There is wasteful spending, misappropriation of funds and outright stealing of our collective patrimony". In essence, ASUU believes that if the leakages in the management of the country's resources are stopped, there will be more than enough to meet the nation's revenue and expenditure targets.

This paper attempts to show that the incessant ASUU strikes have affected the quality of public university education and thus have serious implications for Nigeria's quest for economic development. The general objective of this study is to access the quality of Nigeria's public universities, incessant ASUU strikes and the



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implications for Nigeria's quest for economic development, while the specific research objectives include: to identify the causes of incessant ASUU strikes in Nigeria's public universities; to access the implications of incessant ASUU strikes for Nigeria's quest for economic development, and to suggest possible ways in which ASUU strikes could be better managed.

The study is organized into the following sections: the first is the introduction that gives the background information; section two lays out the theoretical framework; the third section focuses on conceptual clarifications; the fourth section is on the factors responsible for low quality of public university education in Nigeria, while the fifth section examines the reasons for incessant ASUU strikes; the implications of these strikes for Nigeria's quest for economic development is the concern of the sixth section; the last segment is the conclusion, with suggested recommendations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Education

The term education can be loosely described as the purposeful activity directed at achieving certain aims, such as transmitting knowledge or fostering skills and character traits (Wikipedia, 2022). Two forms of education are non-formal and informal education. Formal education takes place in education and training institutions, it is usually structured by curricular aims and objectives, and learning is typically guided by a teacher. Informal education occurs in daily life, in the family, any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels or acts, may be considered educational, whether unintentional or intentional. (Wikipedia, 2022).

Strike

A general accepted definition of strike is lacking. The term strike is generally understood to mean work stoppage, caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. Strikes usually take place in response to employees' grievances. In addition, strikes are sometimes used to pressure governments to change policies.

Economic Development

Economic development indicates the process whereby the economic [welfare](#) and status of [quality of life](#) of countries, regions, or individuals are enhanced according to set goals and aspirations. According to Rehman, Khurshid and Saleem (2019), the term economic development of an economy improves when the individuals of an economy get strong income capacity.

Empirical Review

There has been an observable interest in university education in Nigeria as reflected in the body of literature on its scope, place, mission, quality, and performance over the past two decades. The reason for this could be linked to the widely-shared concern among scholars, bilateral and multilateral organizations on the declining standard of most importantly, public university education in Nigeria's academic system. As a result, nearly all aspects of university education, such as funding, access, equity, gender mainstreaming, infrastructural decay, the impact of information and communication technology (ICT), to name some, have been addressed.

Available literature contains studies on the quality of public university education in Nigeria through the attainment of university education goals by quality delivery (Ossai and Nwalado, 2017). The reports on the quality of public university education explore the parameters for



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measuring quality assurance and challenges of public university education in Nigeria (Asiyai, 2013; Adeniran, Onyekwena, Onubedo, Ishaku, and Ekeruche, 2020). There is also a genuine concern on the funding of public university education, especially through market driven funding mechanism (Uhunmwangho and Diakpomrere, 2019; Nnorom and Nwakaire, 2015).

Although the implication of (Academic Staff Union of Universities) ASUU strikes is also of critical interest to scholars, studies on these aspects have not been adequately covered. A study by Ayuba, Dang, and Nvau, 2020 examined the implications of ASUU's incessant strikes on the socio-economic lives of students and the university campuses. Another addressed the implications on the productivity level and psychosocial development of academic staff (Oyebode and Nbaka, 2022); another study examined the impacts on migration of students to abroad (Okeke, Anierobi, Ezennaka, 2021), while Adepoju and Okotoni, (2018) examined the nexus between public university education, economy and sustainable development including through entrepreneurship education (Adamu, 2015). Overall, a cursory survey of available literature suggests that fewer studies have paid attention to the implications of ASUU's strike on economic development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is a general term which shares the idea that the basic feature of all societies was the struggle between different groups for access to limited resources. Although a number of modern sociologists have described themselves as conflict theorists, only notable scholars such as Karl Marx (1818–1883), Max Weber (1864–1920), Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), and

Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–2009) have formulated theories as to what causes conflict, its normalcy, and the impact it has on societies (Nickerson, 2021). According to Wells (1979, as cited in cited in Obiefuna, 2011), conflict theories assume that all societies have structural power divisions and resource inequalities that lead to groups having conflicting interests. Hence, what these resources are might be different for each theorist. For a scholar like Coser (1972, as cited in Obiefuna, 2011), the limited resources could mean income, status, power, dominion over territory, or ecological position. Although, Karl Marx had hinged class conflict on economic resources, Marx Weber is of the opinion that conflict and inequality can equally be caused by power and status independently of class structures (Nickerson, 2021).

Conflict is relevant and found very useful in explaining and analyzing the realities in Nigeria's public universities. According to this theory, conflict arises when people feel deprived of what they perceive are their fair belongings. For instance, quite a number of Nigerians are aware that Nigeria is endowed with natural resources, yet public universities in Nigeria are arbitrarily shut because the Federal government has consistently failed to honour the agreements signed or entered into with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Consequently, lecturers in Nigeria's public universities see the use of strike action as the most effective means of driving the attention of the government to their plight.

One major criticism of conflict theory is that conflict theory doesn't consider how some relationships between groups benefit both.



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Research Methodology

Content analysis was employed to assess the quality of Nigeria's public universities, incessant ASUU strikes and the implications for Nigeria's quest for economic development. The paper which is theoretical in nature draws its argument basically from secondary data, which includes journal publications, newspapers, and internet publications.

Factors Responsible for Low Quality of Public University Education in Nigeria Underfunding

Reports have shown that Nigeria's public universities have been underfunded for decades. It is therefore not surprising that most of the challenges confronting Nigeria's public universities are traceable to inadequate funding. For instance, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) had recommended that governments of developing nations like Nigeria should allocate between 16-25 percent of their budgets to education. Ironically, Nigeria's federal government's allocations to education have not gone beyond 7 percent (Premium Times, 2022). To this effect, in the 2021 budget, the federal government allocated ₦197 billion for education, out of a budget estimate of over ₦13 trillion. Related to above is that many educational institutions in modern day Nigeria cannot build lecture halls, students' hostels, equip laboratories and workshops, and medical bills (Premium Times, 2022). In addition, underfunding universities could lead to producing half-baked graduates in all spheres, thus making it difficult for them to address new challenges. Subsequently, poor graduates would find it difficult to compete in other fields around the world.

Lack of Quality Academics

Another big indicator of lack of quality in public universities in Nigeria is the lack of

academic staff. In the quest to deliver sound public university education, the importance of quality university teachers cannot be overemphasized. This is because teachers determine the quality of education in any society because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. However, despite the importance of lecturers in the attainment of good university education, institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, especially public universities are short of quality academics to adequately handle teaching and learning activities.

One of the factors responsible for poor quality academics have been hinged on the recruitment of lecturers on political considerations and not on the basis of competence (Premium Times, 2022). The Chairman of the Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria Professor Osodeke had lamented that because of the urgent desire to fill up the space of few lecturers created due to brain drain, the nation's public universities has forced government in employing persons with poor academic qualifications. He further stated: "In some cases now, those who have no business with lecturing have been packed into the system. Some would have Third Class, and they go to the university and get Post-Graduate Diploma and say they want to become lecturers. This should not be accepted anywhere. ..." (Premium Times, 2022).

Reports have shown that in addition to the issue of recruitment, Nigerian public universities academics lack quality because there is no concrete framework for the training and retraining of tertiary institutions staff. In modern times, countries ensure that their education systems evolve with the times. By implication, it is easier to state that academic staff who do not evolve via training and re-training to stay relevant in their field stands the risk of becoming



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obsolete and irrelevant in the fast-paced, every changing world (Business Day, 2020). Ironically, most public universities in Nigeria have remained stuck in antiquity because they lack exposure to handle modern methods of teaching and training (*Ibid*).

Poor Research Activities

One of the specific traditional roles of a university is the presentation and dissemination of knowledge through research. Hence, research is conducted mostly in universities with the objectives to solving problems affecting the society. Findings revealed that the Nigerian universities research income per academic and research staff, research income per institutional income, paper per research income is one of the poorest in the world. This anomaly according to Okoli, Ogbondah and Ewor (2016, as cited in Ogunode, Yiolokun and Akeredolu, 2019) is due to the poor attitude of governments towards research and inadequate funding of research activities.

By and large, scholars and commentators have identified at least three ways in which research has suffered setbacks in Nigeria. The first is when researchers work without sponsorship, especially in the core sciences. It is on record that the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) is virtually the only source of money. Specifically, the TETFUND funds and sponsors research projects, gives grants for research and sponsors lecturers for academic conferences, and any other things. The platform has however been criticized on the basis that its operations are slow, highly selective and sometimes politicized. The second ground is that findings from researches are often abandoned on library shelves. The third is that research output is mediocre and repetitive because there are

no effective measures in place to track down research output nationwide.

Incessant ASUU Strikes

Incessant strike by ASUU is another pointer to low quality in Nigeria's public universities. There is no gainsaying the fact that the closure of universities affects the productivity and the realization of educational aim and objectives. Recently, the National Executive Council (NEC) of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) embarked on another round of strike, which commenced from Monday 14th February, 2022. The union among others gave imposition of IPPIS, outstanding Earned Academic Allowance (EAA), visitation panel, etc as grounds for the recent strike (Premium Times, 2022). Thus universities in Nigeria have been closed down for the past six months, as a result of failure of the federal government to implement the agreement reached with ASUU since 2009, despite all assurances and memorandum of understanding between the two parties. On the part of the students, the disruption of academic activities in Nigerian universities affects students' learning outcomes, as lecturers are unable to complete their course works. In addition, incessant strikes by ASUU disrupts economic activities, societal functions, affects the ratings of the universities and the smearing of the nation's image.

Political Influence

Findings have shown that in recent times, public universities are established without adequate planning and due consideration to the educational needs of the nation. As noted by Adepoju and Okotoni (2018), the establishment of some higher academic institutions in Nigeria has been influenced by political dictates and pressure. They further argued that the creation of these institutions have mostly being based on



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canvass for votes, the fulfillment of electoral promises and the ultimate desire to remain in power. In this direction, scholars have condemned the proliferation of universities, despite government's poor funding of the existing universities. They argued that more attention should be paid to strengthening existing ones to meet required standards and boost the quality of graduates. ASUU has specifically described the creation of new universities and polytechnics by both the Federal and State governments as politicization of university education (The Guardian, 2022). ASUU's coordinator in charge of Owerri zone, Uzo Onyebianama had queried the rationale behind the creation of more universities when it cannot fund the existing ones. He argued further:

"But you know as politicians, given that we are approaching 2023 election, they want to have something for their campaign. When they visit those communities, they tell them they have given them universities. It is not about opening universities, but about funding and sustenance. Why establish new universities when the ones on ground are mere shadows of themselves. If they fund existing ones and expand their facilities those ones can absorb whatever number of students these ones will take" (Guardian, 2022).

In another dimension, reports have shown that the appointment of managers for Nigeria's higher institutions have been fraught with political undertone and affiliations. The above has therefore led to the appointment of Vice Chancellors and governing Council members, who may not be competent to run the institutions for the actualization of the needed knowledge economy to compete favorably with peer nations in position (Adepoju and Okotoni, 2022). To this effect, these types of managers dance to the tune of government pressures and sustain government interest, which runs contrary to efficiency, effectiveness and goals of higher education.

Apart from the factors identified above, other factors responsible for low quality of public university education in Nigeria include: inadequate infrastructural facilities, academic corruption and fraud, poor international ranking, challenges of modern laboratories, etc.

Reasons for ASUU'S Strike (February, 2022 to October, 2022)

As contained in the literature, ASUU has in almost every year for the past decade been embarking on strikes for varied reasons. According to reports, under President Muhammadu Buhari regime, ASUU has embarked on four strikes, totaling 578 days (Punch, 2022). Scholars and commentators have hinged incessant strikes by ASUU on the failure of the Nigeria government to implement agreements it entered into with the union. It will be recalled that in 2009, the federal government signed an agreement with the union after a four-month strike. So, the October 2009 ASUU/FG agreement has been the reason for subsequent industrial actions.

As reported in Premium Times (2022), the National Executive Council (NEC) of ASUU gave the following reasons for embarking on the latest strike:

- Release of revitalization funds for universities
- Payment of outstanding earned academic allowance (EAA)
- Renegotiation of 2009 agreements
- Review of Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) 2004 to tackle the proliferation of universities
- 26 percent budgeting allocation to education sector
- Implementation of the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) for the payment of salaries and allowances of university lecturers



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- Release of the white paper report of the visitation panels to universities
- Withheld salaries and non-remittance of check-off dues of unions
- Salary shortfall

Implications of Incessant ASUU Strikes for Nigeria's Economic Development Hindrance to National Productivity

The need for an accelerated and enhanced productivity in an economy cannot be overemphasized. Similarly, the literature is replete with the fact that universities all over the world contribute tremendously to manpower development and capacity building. In addition, one of the most important parameters in measuring national productivity is human productivity. This is so because the transformation of all other resources toward achieving increased national productivity depends on the human element. However, when labour productivity depreciates, as a result of trade disputes and man-day's lost, the resultant effect is reduction and huge loss in productivity which in turn negatively affects the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Gross National Product (GNP) of a nation. That is why Jill (2018) argued that for productivity to make financial sense for any organization, employees must produce value for the business that exceeds the cost of employees' wages.

Ironically, as noted by scholars, Nigeria remains one of the poorest countries among the global economies. This is because incessant strikes have contributed to its low production and wastages of hours of work. As observed by Osunkwo and Aniagolu (2020), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which represents one of the ways aggregate economic activity is measured, depicts low value as a result of strike actions by ASUU. As a consequence, the annual number of days of industrial disputes which could have assisted in raising aggregate GDP are

allowed to waste. A further consequence is that low aggregate output which emanates from wasted hours of work give rise to low income and low savings, which further affects capital formation, hence resulting in low investment, low production and low income.

Loss of Finance to Overseas Studies

It is not a new phenomenon that many Nigerian students study abroad for foreign study, but the drastic surge in recent times makes it more alarming. As it exists in extant studies, the choice of pursuit of foreign education is largely driven by at least two local problems. The first is due to the perennial underfunding of education and the other, recurring strikes actions by public university lecturers amid protests of low wages and benefits. According to University World News (2022), about 100,000 Nigerian students were enrolled abroad in 2020, which is the highest from an African country. An analysis of data by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) indicated that the Nigerian government in the past decade has spent about US \$221 million on foreign education (Punch, 2022).

However, as reported by the Guardian, a Nigerian local newspaper the implication of foreign study is summarized by Professor Adedeji Olukoju, the pro-chancellor of Chrisland University in Abeokuta, Ogun state, Nigeria, when he said:

"to be fair, sponsors of these children (seeking foreign education) are exercising their right to spend their money (as they wish), but it is harmful when considered in economic terms. Nigeria is seriously hemorrhaging and that flow is not sustainable. It makes us an economic and cultural appendage to the foreign recipients of our capital exports" (Guardian, 2021).

In specific terms, a particular implication of Nigerian students studying abroad is that while it improves on the economy of their



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hosts, it shrinks the economy of Nigeria. For instance, statistics indicated that Nigerian students that embarked on foreign studies by self sponsor in 2021 contributed about \$514 million (about 2.5 trillion) to the United States economy (Daily Post, 2021).

Brain Drain

The inability to retain highly specialized manpower constitutes another serious implication of the incessant ASUU strikes for Nigeria's economic development. This is because countries which have better conditions of service will often attract specialized manpower of other countries, whose conditions are poor. There is no gainsaying the fact the quest for greener pastures have encouraged the exit of high level manpower from Nigeria's tertiary institutions to other advanced countries of the world. Scholars such as Ekundayo, Konwea, Osalusi and Arogundade (2010) have indentified the causes of brain drain in Nigerian universities to include: poor funding of the university education system, social unrest and conflicts, poor working environment, inadequate research and facilities. The consequences of brain drain have also manifested in the following ways: lowering of standard of education, reduction in the quality of skilled manpower in Nigeria universities, raising of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the recipient countries, etc.

Specifically, the Academic Staff Union Universities (ASUU) have attributed the exodus of Nigerian lectures majorly to poor remuneration. ASUU's president, Professor Emmanuel Osodeke had informed that while countries like Ghana, the United Kingdom and United States of America were paying their varsity lecturers attractive and competitive salaries, the case remained different in Nigeria. The ASUU president perceptively notes: "A professor

is earning about \$700 a month in Nigeria, would he leave the UK where he is earning between €10,000 to come and teach in Nigeria? Would he leave Ghana where he earns between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to come and teach in Nigeria? No!" (Punch, 2022).

Foreign Direct Investment

No doubt, foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a critical role in stimulating and accelerating economic growth and development, which in the overall has serious implication for a county's economic development. According to the Wikipedia (2022), foreign direct investment is an investment in the form of a controlling ownership in business in one country by an entity based in another country. Bitar, Hamadeh and Khoueri (2019), point out that the inflow of FDI boost technology transfer, local company productivity, and financial capital requirements, resulting in job creation and economic growth.

However, despite the huge role FDI plays in the economic growth of developing countries, strikes have become a major obstacle to the continuous flow of FDI in Nigeria. As part of the implications of incessant ASUU strikes, foreign investors are scared away and are not encouraged to invest in an environment that lacks industrial peace and harmony, where their return on investment will be distorted as a result of strikes and work stoppages. For instance, in a report published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) for the first and second quarter of 2021, Nigeria received a sum of \$875.62 million foreign inflows in Q2 2021, which according to analysts represents a significant year-on-year decline (Nairametrics, 2021).

Conclusion

The quality of public university education is indispensable to economic development.



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Arguably, the university education system is the only institution that is responsible for the production and development of manpower within the context of the needs of the nation.

This study showed that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) incessant strikes has a negative bearing on the quality of public university education and by extension portends serious implications for Nigeria's quest for economic development. The finding of this paper revealed that ASUU incessant strikes are due to the failure of the Federal Government of Nigeria to honour the agreements reached with it in 2009. The paper therefore suggests that since most of the challenges confronting Nigeria's public universities are traceable to inadequate funding, improved funding of Nigeria's universities should be a matter of priority.

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Recommendations

On the basis of the identified implications of incessant ASUU strikes on the Nigeria's quest for economic development, the following recommendations are proffered:

- There is need for legislation that will give legal backing to collective agreements;
- Federal and State governments should always keep to their promises and bargains
- In line with United Nations Scientific Cultural Organisation's declaration, government at all levels should progressively increase education budget annually to 26 percent;
- The university management and government at all levels should encourage democratic leadership styles in conflict management and resolution.

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