

An Assessment of the Impact of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on Human Resource Development in Nigerian Universities

Uzoh, Bonaventure Chigozie

Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Email: bc.uzoh@unizik.edu.ng

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on Human Resource Development (HRD) in Nigerian Universities. ASUU as a union of academics in Nigerian Universities has done so much in ensuring proper Human Resource Development in Nigerian Universities. The wage structure that is in place in Nigerian public Universities today is as a result of ASUU struggles. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) which was formerly known as Education Trust Fund (ETF) and saddled with the responsibility of providing funds for the provision and upgrading of teaching and learning facilities and training of University staff is a brain child of ASUU. The Needs Assessment Fund that is also currently used in setting up structures, providing teaching and learning facilities and of course training of academic staff of Nigerian Universities is a fall out of the 2013 ASUU strike that lasted for six months. Based on the foregoing it wouldn't be an overstatement to say that if not for ASUU University education in Nigeria would have collapsed a long time ago. Education is generally very poorly funded at all levels in Nigeria which explains the level of decay in the educational system. This paper therefore contends that ASUU has always played a leading role in Human Resource Development in Nigerian Universities through its numerous and continuous engagements with the Government to always do the needful in ensuring that educational development in Nigeria remains on track. It is recommended that Human Resource Development through qualitatively education should be the priority of government. Education should be properly funded and other proactive measures put in place to ensure that the ivory towers are always in good shape.

Key Words: Human Resource Development, Education, Training, Government, funding.

Introduction

The principal aim of trade unions is to promote their members' interests. They can do this only if the undertakings in which their members are employed prosper. They therefore have interest in the success of these undertakings and essential contributions to them by cooperating in measures to promote increased productivity and efficiency. They also share with management the responsibility for good industrial relations (Pemedede, 2007). Trade unionism is concerned with the organization of the labour force which is an important element in the process of

production. It is the aggregate of people that work using their capabilities or skills to render services so as to earn a living, develop themselves and the economy at large.

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) can therefore be seen to be a trade union whose activities being lawful and not inconsistent with the spirit and practice of trade unionism are covered by the laws of the land. ASUU may approach issues from different perspectives; indeed ASUU's liberal, sometimes radical and militant stance more often than not, bring them into conflict with the government. ASUU's disenchantment with government over issues of university autonomy, poor conditions of service, poor funding and non-conducive environment for academic pursuit had been simmering for years and had been the theme for fruitless negotiations and dialogue with successive Federal Ministries of Education (Iyayi, 2002; Pemedede, 2007).

There is no doubt whatsoever that, for the university system to function as efficiently and effectively as expected, the stakeholders need to work in harmony, collaborating with ASUU, to a great extent with a clear sense of focus having vision and mission. This guides the university in its development processes as well as its service to the society. In the same vein, the society needs to be in good condition and state of living. But this is not the concern of the stakeholders in Nigeria. Therefore, ASUU as a trade union, in order to fight for their rights, good working conditions in the universities and better living standards for the masses in society have been engaging in incessant strike actions so as to press home her demands (Maduewesi, 2002; Iyayi, 2002; Pemedede, 2007).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has since the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo and the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari through the successive military regimes (Buhari, Babangida, Abacha and Abdulsalami), taken up the duty of intellectuals, throughout the world, to promote the development of education in Nigeria (ASUU, 2013). This duty requires the creation of first-rate higher educational institutions, especially universities; a well-funded system with advanced and adequate teaching and research facilities, and internationally competitive remuneration to keep Nigerian academics in their country and attract other academics from all over the world (ASUU, 2013).

Since the 1980s, ASUU has been engaging the Federal and State Governments on the need to reposition the Nigerian university system to effectively deliver on its mandate. This became imperative in the face of massive exodus of seasoned academics particularly to European and American universities; the deplorable state of facilities for research, teaching and learning; gross underfunding; and steady erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom by successive governments in Nigeria (Uzoh and Anigbogu, 2013).

Giving ASUU's principle of achieving professional excellence, its contention on the issue of better pay and working conditions for academics in Nigerian universities cannot be unjustifiable. The union negotiates from time to time for improvement on staff development grants, research grants, research fellowship fund and other academic grants and allowances directed towards manpower development in the system and the nation at large (ASUU, 2000). This position of ASUU has not changed but the government appears to be insisting on its own style of solving the problems of brain drain, manpower development and quality in Nigerian university system (ASUU, 2000). This study therefore examines the numerous contributions of

ASUU to human resource development in Nigerian Universities. The gap in knowledge that this study sets out to fill is to correct the bad impression the general public in Nigeria has about ASUU which is a disruptive agency rather a union that continuously puts the Government on its toes to always do the right thing. ASUU remains the most powerful trade union in Nigeria. It does not dine with the Government which explains why it is difficult to infiltrate its ranks. It goes beyond its primary mandate of protecting the interests of its members to fight for the down-trodden in the Nigerian society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU): The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is a Nigerian union of University academic staff with a history of militant action. ASUU is a trade union whose objectives include regulation of relations between academic staff and employers; encouragement of the participation of its members in the affairs of the university system and of the nation, protection and advancement of the socio-economic and cultural interest of the nation; establishment and maintenance of a high standard of academic performance and professional practice; establishment and maintenance of just and proper conditions of service for its members (Pemedede, 2007).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was formed in 1978. Its predecessor, the Nigerian Association of University Teachers was formed in 1965. ASUU covers all academic staff in all of the Federal and State Universities in the country. The union was active in struggles against the military regime during the 1980s (Wikipedia, 2016). In 1988 the union organized a national strike to obtain fair wages and University autonomy. As a result, ASUU was proscribed on 7th August, 1988 and all its property seized. It was allowed to resume activities in 1990, but after another strike was again banned on 23rd August, 1992. However, an agreement was reached on 3rd September, 1992 that met several of the union's demands including the right of workers to collective bargaining. ASUU organized further strikes in 1994 and 1996, protesting against the dismissal of University academic staff by the Sani Abacha military regime (Wikipedia, 2016).

After the return of democracy in 1999 with the Nigerian Fourth Republic, the union continued to be militant in demanding the rights of University workers against opposition by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. In July 2002 Dr Oladipo Fashina, the then national president of the union, petitioned Justice Mustapha Akanbi of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to investigate the authorities of University of Ilorin for financial mismanagement and corruption (Wikipedia, 2016).

In 2007, ASUU went on strike for three months. In May 2008, it held two one-week warning strikes to press a range of demands, including an improved salary scheme and reinstatement of 49 lecturers who were dismissed many years earlier. In June 2009, ASUU ordered its members in federal and state Universities nationwide to proceed on an indefinite strike over disagreements with the Federal Government on an agreement it reached with the union about two and half years earlier. After three months strike in October 2009, the union and other staff unions signed a memorandum of understanding with the government and called off the industrial action (Wikipedia, 2016). On 1st July, 2013,

ASUU embarked on another strike which lasted for five months and fifteen days was called off on 16th December, 2013. Claims made by ASUU with regards to the strike are centered largely on funding and revitalization of Nigerian public universities as well as a certain earned allowance which it claims to be in arrears of 92 billion naira at that time. Presently the figure is far higher than that as a result of accumulated arrears up to 2016.

Another round of disagreement is brewing between the Federal Government and ASUU with respect to the non-implementation of the 2009 FGN/ASUU agreement and a number of other issues bordering on funding, welfare of staff, and smooth running of public Universities in Nigeria. ASUU has already gone on one week warning strike between 16th and 22nd November, 2016 to force the Government back to the negotiating table. Negotiations have however commenced between the two parties but no one knows what the outcome would be.

Human Resource Development: Human resource development has been defined as empowering people by fostering the contributory capacities that they can bring to the improvement of their own quality of life and that of their families, communities, enterprises and societies. Over the years, the concept of human resources development has evolved from solely focusing on individual capacity to also building institutional capacity at the national level, through socio-economic policies and development plans and strategies (United Nations, 2009). Human resources development is therefore regarded as facilitating the development of national human capacities to achieve sustainable, inclusive, equitable development and at the same time, enhance the well-being of individuals. As such, human resources development strategies are increasingly part of national development planning (United Nations, 2009).

Human resources development refers to the part of human resources management that specifically deals with training and development of the employees. Human resources development is the process of increasing the capacity of the human resource through development. It is thus the process of adding value to individuals, teams or an organization as a human system. It could also be referred to as a systematic and planned approach through which the efficiency of employees is improved. The future goals and objectives are set by the entire organization, which are well planned at individual and organizational levels. Human resources development is a continuous process for the development of all types of skills of employees such as technical, managerial, behavioural, and conceptual. It includes training an individual after he/she is first hired, providing opportunities to learn new skills, distributing resources that are beneficial for the employee's tasks, and any other developmental activities (United Nations, 2009).

Human resources development lies at the heart of economic, social, and environmental development. It is also a vital component for achieving internationally agreed sustainable development goals, and for expanding opportunities to all people, particularly the most vulnerable groups and individuals in society (United Nations, 2009).

A Theoretical Review of the Contributions of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to Human Resource Development in Nigerian Universities.

Since the 1980s, ASUU has been engaging the federal and state governments on the need to reposition the Nigerian university system to effectively deliver on its mandate. This became imperative in the face of massive exodus of seasoned academics particularly to European and American universities; the deplorable state of facilities for research, teaching and learning; gross underfunding; and steady erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom by successive governments in Nigeria (Uzoh and Anigbogu, 2013). ASUU has always insisted that the virtual complete domination of Nigeria's economy and politics by the Bretton Woods Institutions (IMF and World), and the inevitable erosion of our national pride since 1960, are direct consequences of the mismanagement of national resources, leading essentially, to the virtual destruction of the economy and the educational system (ASUU,2013)

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) formerly Education Trust Fund (ETF) is a product of a challenge posed to ASUU by Government in the early 1990s. Government then challenged ASUU to propose 'other' viable sources of generating funds that could be used to save tertiary education in Nigeria through interventions and extra budgetary supports. ASUU worked out detailed policy formulation and managerial structure of ETF now (TETFund) which formed part of FGN/ASUU Agreement of 1992 (ASUU, 2013). Although at its initial conception, the ETF intervention was intended to be a special intervention in Tertiary Education only, the Military government enlarged its scope to cover all levels of Education- Primary, Secondary and Higher Education. The intervention of the ETF did not make the intended significant changes in the educational system at any level (ASUU, 2013). In 2011, the ETF law was repealed and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund Act was enacted as a transformative intervention agency for rehabilitation, restoration, and consolidation of the tertiary education in Nigeria. TETFund had been making visible impact in supporting tertiary education in terms of sponsoring academic staff in Nigerian universities for higher degrees, and sponsoring conferences, workshops and valuable research endeavours (ASUU, 2013).

The Federal Government in considering the call by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in the FGN/ASUU Agreement of 2009 to revitalize the public universities to meet national and international standards constituted the Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities (CNANU) in 2012 (Implementation Monitoring Committee (IMC), 2014). The committee was saddled with the task of determining the actual status of Nigerian Public Universities in terms of infrastructural facilities, services and resources, staffing and enrollment, environment and utilities as well as quality of delivery of teaching and learning; to determine the gap between existing status, skills, abilities and capacities of the universities and those that are needed for the universities to function at optimal level; and to make the right prioritization and therefore optimize resource allocation which could lead to proper deployment of resources to get value for money, save cost while making maximum impact, as well as improve efficiency and institutional effectiveness (IMC, 2014). The impact of the Needs Assessment Intervention Fund for Nigerian Public Universities is being felt in various ways including providing learning facilities and conducive learning environment for students as well as staff training and development.

The issues of funding and facilities have been the cause of friction between ASUU and the government in almost all instances. This is because the union at different periods has been finding it difficult to teach in an environment without the expected amenities or with poor facilities (Pemedede, 2007). ASUU's contention has been to refuse underfunding of the universities which undermines the capacity of universities to maintain standards at desirable levels. Underfunding has made staff and students not to have access to the latest books and journals, laboratories lack equipment, so experiments cannot be conducted and local research funds have virtually dried up (Pemedede, 2007).

Furthermore, the recent trends in wages and salaries administration in Nigeria have been clearly necessitated by the roles of the various trade unions in the country with ASUU playing a fundamental role, especially with respect to academic staff in Nigerian universities (Agburu, 2012). Perhaps, one of the most interesting features of the current trends in the wage and salary administration with respect to the university system can be seen to reside in the realization by the Nigerian government that the university academics represent the crucial mass of scholars in the society with the potential for transforming it. In the light of this, the government felt that academics deserve unique conditions of service which will motivate them like the intellectuals in other parts of the world to attain greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery, with regard to teaching, research and community service and thereby stem the tide of "brain drain". The new university salary structure indicates that the basic pay has increased considerably and all the accolades go to ASUU (Agburu, 2012).

Based on the most recent developments, it has been agreed that the entitled academic staff shall be paid a number of allowances. These allowances include those of postgraduate supervision; teaching practice/industrial supervision/field trip allowances; honoraria for external/internal examiner (postgraduate thesis); honoraria for external moderation of undergraduate and postgraduate examination, and postgraduate study grant. Apart from the foregoing, other allowances include those for external assessment of Readers and Professors; call duty/clinical hazard responsibility allowance; excess workload allowance and Earned Academic Allowance (Aguru, 2012).

The theoretical thrust of this paper is the Marxian class theory associated with Karl Marx (1818 – 1883). Marx's class theory rests on the premise that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". According to this view, ever since human society emerged from its primitive and relatively undifferentiated state it has remained fundamentally divided between classes who clash in pursuit of class interests. Class interests and the confrontations of power that they bring in their wake are to Marx the central determinant of social and historical process (Coser, 1977; Marx and Engels, 1998)

Marx's analysis continually centers on how the relationships between men are shaped by their respective positions with regard to the means of production, that is, by their differential access to scarce resources and scarce power. He notes that unequal access need not at all times and under all circumstances lead to active class struggle (Coser, 1977). Although he considered it axiomatic that the potential for class conflict is inherent in every differentiated society, since such a society systematically generates conflicts of interest between persons and groups differentially located within the social structure, and, more particularly, in relation to the means

of production. Marx was concerned with the ways in which specific positions in the social structure tended to shape the social experiences of their incumbents and to predispose them to actions oriented to improve their collective fate (Coser,1977; Marx and Engels, 1998). A class is those who share common economic interests, are conscious of those interests, and engage in collective action which advances those interests (Edwards, 1983). Within Marxian class theory, the structure of the production process forms the basis of class construction.

Marxian class theory adequately captures the situation in Nigeria where the political and administrative elites that constitute the ruling class appropriate more than their fair share of the commonwealth leaving the majority of the people to wallow in poverty. This reflects the repressive character of the Nigerian state and the rigid class structure that is reinforced at every point in time. The people in Government want all the public Universities which the children of the poor people can afford to attend to collapse, after all, their children do not attend these schools, because they train their children abroad from the public purse. They also set up their own private Universities from the public purse. They are not happy that the public Universities are still surviving because they want their own schools to be patronized. These explain why the educational sector in Nigerian is very poorly funded. ASUU representing the exploited class has therefore remained in the vanguard of the struggle to ensure that the public Universities in Nigeria do not collapse. ASUU must always go on strike to remind government of its responsibilities towards educational development in Nigeria. They continuously recycle themselves in power which explains why successive regimes in Nigeria show similar disdain for educational development especially for the benefit of the less privileged Nigerians.

Conclusion

Human Resource Development remains the key to national development. When human beings are properly developed through the instrumentality of education, they acquire the capacity to drive national development. Unfortunately, this not the way Nigerian leaders see it and that explains why education is not given a pride of place in our national budgets even with the recommendation of UNESCO that national governments should always allocate at least 26 per cent of their annual budgets to education. This is why ASUU has continued to hammer on proper funding of public Universities in Nigeria and without the efforts of this union these Universities would have degenerated to the level where they can no longer be redeemed. ASUU continues to ensure that the development of human resources within the ivory towers is not abandoned because of its negative consequences for national development. Unless we begin to have more responsible governments in Nigeria the struggle in this direction will continue. The significance of this study is that it has been able to bring out the numerous contributions the Academic Staff Union of Universities have been making and continue to make towards the growth, development and more importantly, the preservation of public Universities in Nigeria. Many undiscerning minds have already labeled ASUU a union that disrupts academic activities in Nigerian public Universities as result of the frequent strikes organized by the union, but strike remains the only weapon at the disposal of the union to gain concessions from Government. In Nigeria, the only language Government understands is that of strike. If not for ASUU many of the public Universities in Nigeria would have closed down.

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