

## **University Management Perception of Academic Staff Union of Universities [Asuu] Struggles In Nigeria: Implication for Counselling And Productivity**

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the trend towards the intensified industrial disharmony in the ivory towers in the Nigerian educational system. It sensitizes the plethora logger head with the trade unions particularly, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on the university campuses. It is a uniform concept applicable to all the campuses having the body. The question is what is the University management's perception of unionism on campus? How does the administrative structure inherited from colonialism guarantee the desired creative intellectual ground breaking decision making? These are some of the questions examined in this paper. The issues of decentralization, delegation and deregulation or independence are also highlighted and to which extent it guarantees industrial harmony. Going by their available evidences, it is clear that the University management of the various Universities, have a low perception of unionism on campus, hence the desired industrial harmony remains a mirage. There is a link between the university management's perception of unionism and the attitude to work, which is largely unfavourable. Recommendations are however proffered and the link between industrial harmony in the University campus and effective counselling practices is established.*

**Keywords:** *University management, perception, unionism, counselling, productivity*

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### **I. Introduction**

Trade unions are associations of workers or organizations formed together by labour, workers or employees to achieve their demands for better condition at their work atmosphere. In Nigeria trade unions go by the name labour union, or trade union which is an organization of workers who have joined together to achieve goals in areas such as wages and working conditions .The unions negotiate contract and conditions with employers, keeping employees' satisfaction high and protecting workers from unsafe or unfair conditions. Trade unions are governed by the law in Nigeria; they should follow the procedure and mode of registration for formation of the trade union according to the law of the country. Trade unionis formed in accordance with the law of the land shall have the privileges or rights given the trade union,. It should perform certain duties with respect to workers. The primary purpose of a trade union is collective bargaining. In India, trade unions can be formed by the persons engaged in trade orbusiness .

Every registered trade union according to the law of trade union shall have certain functions for the achievement of certain objectives. The primary objective of the trade union is to protect the interests of the workers and exploitation against him by the management or employer. The trade unions shall also support the management or employer in its functioning and contribute to the organisation by way of encouraging workers in a positive way for the improvement of overall efficiency of the organization.

#### **The Campus Experience in Nigeria in respect of Academic Staff Union Of Universities[ASUU]**

Organized trade unions officially started on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1912, when workers in the then civil service organised themselves into trade unions as was done in Sierra Leone (Egboh, 1968).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) evolved from the ashes of the Association of University Teachers (NAUT). NAUT was formed in 1965 as a trade union platform, according to Jega (2009) to advance the collective interests of the University teachers. It was then adjudged the most passive trade union in Nigeria at that time. It was an elitist trade union without any sign of militancy. The first President of NAUT led the union for 11 years unchallenged. The members of the union were never concerned about the running of the union because there was no reason to do so. Salaries were not delayed and were among the highest period. The exalted position of ASUU was already getting serious. Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations and UNESCO conventions that request member nations to commit each year, at least, 26 percent of their resources to education. But the government's vote for the educational sector has ranged, between 7-10 percent, suffice to say, the present government allocated a meagre 7% to education. As the table below shows, Nigeria Academic Staff earned the least in Africa in 1997.

**Table 1: Academic Staff salaries in selected**

| Countries    | Academic salaries per annum (US & salaries |                 |           |
|--------------|--|-----------------|-----------|
|              | Lecturer                                   | Senior Lecturer | Professor |
| South Africa | 15,000                                     | 30,000          | 55,000    |
| Zimbabwe     | 12,000                                     | 24,000          | 48,000    |
| Ethiopia     | 3,600                                      | 4,800           | 6,000     |
| Kenya        | 3,600                                      | 4,500           | 5,400     |
| Ghana        | 1,800                                      | 3,000           | 4,800     |
| Nigeria      | 222  | 360             | 439.2     |

Source: ASUU, National Secretariat Publications, 1997)

**Poorly / Underfunded Educational Sector Inconsistent with UNESCO Standard and Best Global Practices**

Table 2: Federal Government Allocation to Education Sector (1999-2013)

| Years | Allocation | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------------|
| 1999  | 23.0       | 11.2       |
| 2000  | 44.2       | 8.03       |
| 2001  | 39.9       | 7.0        |
| 2002  | 100.2      | 5.1        |
| 2003  | 64.8       | 11.8       |
| 2004  | 72.2       | 7.8        |
| 2005  | 92.6       | 8.3        |
| 2006  | 166.6      | 8.7        |
| 2007  | 137.5      | 6.1        |
| 2008  | 210.0      | 13.0       |
| 2009  | 183.4      | 7.2        |
| 2010  | 249.1      | 6.4        |
| 2011  | 356.49     | 7.5        |
| 2012  | -          | 8.4        |
| 2013  | 426.53     | 8.7        |

**Table 3: Annual Budgetary Allocation to Education by some selected countries (Source, World Bank, 2012)**

| S/N | Country             | % Budget Allocation to Education | Position         |
|-----|---------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1   | Ghana               | 31.0                             | 1 <sup>st</sup>  |
| 2   | Cote d'Ivoire       | 30.0                             | 2 <sup>nd</sup>  |
| 3   | Uganda              | 27.0                             | 3 <sup>rd</sup>  |
| 4   | Morocco             | 26.4                             | 4 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 5   | South Africa        | 25.8                             | 5 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 6   | Switzerland         | 24.3                             | 6 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 7   | Mexico              | 24.3                             | 7 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 8   | Kenya               | 23.0                             | 8 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 9   | United Arab Emirate | 22.5                             | 9 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 10  | Botswana            | 19.0                             | 10 <sup>th</sup> |
| 11  | Iran                | 17.7                             | 11 <sup>th</sup> |
| 12  | USA                 | 17.1                             | 12 <sup>th</sup> |
| 13  | Tunisia             | 17.0                             | 13 <sup>th</sup> |
| 14  | Lesotho             | 17.0                             | 14 <sup>th</sup> |
| 15  | Burkina faso        | 16.8                             | 15 <sup>th</sup> |
| 16  | Norway              | 16.2                             | 16 <sup>th</sup> |
| 17  | Columbia            | 15.6                             | 17 <sup>th</sup> |
| 18  | Nicaragua           | 15.0                             | 18 <sup>th</sup> |
| 19  | India               | 12.7                             | 19 <sup>th</sup> |
| 20  | Nigeria             | 8.4                              | 20 <sup>th</sup> |

Source;World Bank Report, [2012]

The assault on academic freedom was the subject of resistance by ASUU throughout the 1980s. In 1978, the Uthman Mohammed Commission Report included an instrument for the Federal Government usurpation of the disciplinary functions of governing councils.

The Federal Government directed some councils to dismiss certain members from their posts without the rights of a hearing. This practice carried over into the Babangida and Abacha military regimes.

For instance in 1980, ASUU declared a trade dispute and made autonomy an issue. In December 1980, President Shehu Shagari directed the council of the University of Lagos to remove six Senior Academic Staff members from their jobs, following justice Belonwu's visitation panel Report. ASUU protested and continued to press for their reinstatement. In 1986, the Supreme Court judgement was given in favour of the academics at the University of Lagos, vindicating ASUU's position. Between 1980 and 1981, ASUU had a struggle with the Shagari government. Its concerns were funding, salaries, autonomy and academic freedom, the brain drain as well as the survival of the University system. ASUU also worked with separated industrial unions and state chapters of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

In 1985, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime began a programme of retrenchment of workers and a wages freeze. It clamped down on the Nigerian Medical Association and the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) when the doctors went on strike to protest the sharp deterioration in health services. ASUU supported the doctors' union. The government sacked doctors, arrested and detained NMA and NARD leaders, as well as ASUU leaders.

The picture painted above underscored a conflict situation that demands a kind of internal mechanism use by various authorities in resolving conflicts. Conflict according to Bens (1997) is the situation where a group feels that their needs or desires are likely to be denied. Owens (1995) postulated that conflict occurs whenever incompatible activities occur, while Abdu-Raheem (2004) argued that it could mean strife, controversy, discord of action and antagonism.

A number of research findings showed that various form of conflict also occur at varying degrees and proportions in the Universities. Amuseghan (2007) for instance found that a level occurrence of student-authority conflicts in the United Kingdom (U.K) and Canadian Universities was high while Oyebade (2000) and Awosusi (2005) reported that the level of occurrence of staff authority in Nigeria Universities was also high.

In order to resolve conflicts on the campuses, Ladipo (1997), Adeyemi&Ademilua (2012) quoting a number of conflict management methods; avoidance, structural shapes, forcing, compromise and smoothing. In a related study, Hodge and Anthony (191) identified conflict management strategies as suppression, third-party intervention, cooperation, democratic process, job rotation as well as confrontation. Meyer (1994) proposed effective communication, that is capable of leading to problem solving. Oyebade (1993) identified certain strategies such as dialogue, emergency and delaying approaches (Adeyemi, Ademilua, 2012).

Despite all the existence of all these conflict management strategies, conflict is still part of day to day affair of the University administration. Hence, dissatisfaction and disharmony have often emerged and developed from unsatisfied demands or unchecked exhibitions of managerial prerogative amongst the three unions, resulting in conflict and eventually leading to disruption of academic activities.

Concerning the constitution of the workers in the University, Fajana (1995) described NASU as an organisation with some members in higher position, while others occupy lower ranks, there is also the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Iyayi (2002) sees ASUU as a union of intellectual workers who believe that life begins only when there is justice, and to have justice the union must speak, uphold, defend and advance the truth.

There is no doubt the prevalence of industrial harmony allow for a climate of industrial peace, the promotion of industrial safety, occupational health and welfare of persons employed. It also ensures the protection of workers from poor working conditions and the development of programmes and machinery for making maximum use of manpower, measuring their skills.

The perception and attitude of the University managements in the recent times according to Obasa (2012) is characterised by anti-union activities and non-recognition, insult by management, favouritism to certain workers, delay in signing agreements, management refusal to remit union dues and non-payment of salaries and allowances.

This perception and attitudes are established on the platform that is provided by the government who has been controlling the affairs of the universities, even, in some cases against the wishes of the management teams. This has deteriorated to the level of undue interference in the affairs of the institutions. The long quest for academic freedom and University autonomy is still a mirage. Hence, governing councils are still stooges to the government of the day. In addition, the educational deregulation as it may, have its defects. The emergence of private universities in Nigeria is not a helping factor for unionism, there is conspicuous aversion to unionism in the private universities in Nigeria. This notwithstanding, decision making in private universities are private sector compliant, so there is tendency for rational decision making, cost effectiveness, less wastes, aversion and a higher probability of meeting market demands. Although, there is unavoidable cooperative trends in private

and public universities, especially in the area of staffing, the private depends on older public universities for experienced academic staff who teach part-time often in these private ones.

## **II. Implication for Industrial Harmony and Productivity**

Industrial harmony and high productivity is contingent upon effective communication between the stakeholders in any organization. The stakeholders include the management and the executive of the union and the members of the unions under the law.

Since the University organization thrives on the foundation of freedom to read, to study, to research, to investigate, to critique, to conclude, it is bound to clash with despotism. For the government to continue to be the designer, the conceiver, the planner, the builder, the supervisor, the guardian, the mentor and the all in all for the University community, the government will continue to interfere with the University autonomy and academic freedom. Hence, the public Universities must be decentralized for autonomy efficiency and productivity.

## **III. Counselling Skills for Adjustment and Productivity**

Counselling is central to the work of the Guidance Counsellor which is required in the industrial setting. Guidance and counselling is an interactive process between counsellor and client, which can involve working with the individual in a one-to-one or group setting.

The skills of empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard facilitate clients in identifying options, making decisions, and resolving difficulties. These skills also include: active listening, clarifying, paraphrasing, setting boundaries, contracting, challenging, focusing, motivating, utilizing non verbal communications, probing, questioning, reflecting feelings, prioritizing issues, structuring and summarizing a session and reviewing progress.

Guidance and Counselling may involve facilitating and assisting clients with emotional issues, social issues, cultural issues, relationship and developmental issues, developing self management skills, coping with transitions, coping with crises, promoting and developing personal awareness, working with feelings, perceptions, and internal and external conflict, economic and labour market issues.

The Counsellor will have knowledge of the major vocational guidance theories, understand the theoretical origins of career development work, and use a theoretical framework, through which to understand individual career development. This, he does in cooperation with the trade union. The Guidance Counsellor also has the ability to describe change and transition in the context of lifespan care development, help individuals adapt to and manage change and transition as well as helping individuals to understand and accept that change and transition are normal parts of life (OECD, Paris, 2004).

## **IV. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The foregoing evidences establish the facts that unionism in the Nigerian Universities exist, and that their existence is justified. The justification rests on the need to cater for the welfare of their members and facilitate the smooth running of the organization for efficiency and productivity. The unions have adopted dialogue and collective bargaining to address the welfare of their members, in most cases, which have not yielded the desired results. This can be explained by the overwhelming control and undue interference of the government on the University machineries. The scenarios portrayed in Tables 1,2and3 are unacceptable. Lecturers are poorly paid, universities poorly funded and these have reduced Nigeria to an ant in the committee of nations and a platform or continued industrial conflicts on our campuses.

To this end, recommendations are made: That the management of Universities in Nigeria should adopt a blend of management strategies in managing conflicts in their constitutions for higher administrative effectiveness.

That, the Nigerian government should fund the Universities adequately in compliance to the UN and the UNESCO requirements.

That, the Universities be granted academic freedom and autonomy.

That the university management be more sensitive to the needs of their staff members.

The government should ensure that unionism is given its rightful place in the private Universities.

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