

Implications of Incessant Strike Actions on the Implementation of Technical Education Programme in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper was designed to x-ray the implications of incessant strike actions on the implementation of Technical education programme in Nigeria. The paper took an exploratory view on the concept of strike actions in Nigeria with particular references on notable strike actions that have occurred in Nigeria. The types of strike were explained and some of them examined include: recognition strike, economic strike, jurisdictional strike, sympathy strike and wildcat strike. The causes of strike actions were also examined and they include: unfair treatment to the employees/victimization, violation of legislation and poor application of the provision of collective bargaining. The implications of strike actions on Technical education programme were examined also. A major contribution made in this paper was in the area of repositioning the mindset of stakeholders on the implications of these incessant strike actions on the implementation of Technical education programme in Nigeria. One of the recommendations advanced was that Government should ensure adequate provision of infrastructures and facilities in various institutions.

Keywords : incessant, strike, implementation, technical education

Introduction

Strike actions are increasingly gaining recognition in the educational sector of this country; and this phenomenon has attracted the attention of well-meaning Nigerians and stakeholders. The term 'strike' has been described in different forms. According to Hornby (2001), strike is a period of time when an organized group of employees of a company stops working because of a disagreement over payment or certain conditions. Those that are often involved in these strike actions are described as strikers. Disagreement or conflict is a common phenomenon in any organizations owing to the diversity of workforce in an organization; and the difference between individual and organizational goals. The country has been experiencing strike actions since 20th century. Wogu (1969) documented notable strike actions that took place in the country amongst which are: Aba women riot, 1929; Railway workers' strike, 1938; Nigerian union of railway men strike, 1941; General strike, 1945; UAC employees in yctstrike, 1947; Coal miners' strike, 1949; Mercantile workers' strike, 1950 and Airways workers' union strike, 1959. All these strike actions took place prior to independence and ever since independence, strike actions have continued to exist.

Strike actions may persist for some time owing to the obvious points highlighted above. Once a strike action continues to persist without stopping, it is described as incessant strike actions. Nigerian educational system in recent times has been characterized by incessant strike actions across the tiers of the educational system. The first notable strike in Nigeria was held in 1945 and ever since, different groups and unions have been embarking on strike actions across the sectors of the economy. From observations, the educational sector has received the greatest hit among all sectors (Olakunle, 2011). There have been series of strike actions in the nation's educational sector and especially tertiary institutions. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) embarked on strike in 2013 and the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) strike in 2014 are recent incessant strike actions which have led to school disruption and stress among all concerned stakeholders. This often cause a big setback in educational industry in Nigeria and calls worries that necessitate drastic action by the nation. In some cases, union leaders have been attacked and some of them have sustained serious injuries; and some have paid with their lives due to its prolonged nature. These developments have in no small measure have negative impact and also affected Technical education programme in Nigeria.

Technical educators are always concerned with the possible implications that incessant strike actions will probably have on Technical education programme. Technical education is an integral aspect of Technical and Vocational Education, and it involves the study of technology and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Technical education students are supposed to fulfill certain requirements and show reasonable mastery of Technical education skills upon graduation. But when there is strike action, the academic calendar will be altered and adjusted in order to meet up with the current reality and this has the tendency of bringing about elongated school years. In some cases, Technical education students may be subjected to rush and thereby leading to poor mastery of course content. Considering the notable slogan of 'no

work no pay' in Nigeria, strike actions always result in untold hardship among Technical educators and this go a long way in negatively affecting their morale and attitude towards Technical education research.

Apart from the negative tendency and implications strike have on the human resources in the field of Technical education, it also has adverse effects on the non-human resources (equipment and facilities) used in the teaching and learning of Technical education course content. It is based on the forgoing that this paper is positioned to examine the implications of incessant strike actions on the implementation of Technical education programme in Nigeria by extensively reviewing relevant scholarly literatures in the field.

Concept of strike

The term strike is a common phenomenon that cut across all tiers of the globe. According to Hornby (2001), strike is a period of time when an organized group of employees of a company stops working because of a disagreement over pay or conditions. It can be seen as an action/attitude exhibited by a group of people (that is, employees or students) to express their level of disagreement with a view to attracting favourable responses from those concerned. Strike actions over time have been used as a tool by union leaders in registering their grievances concerning pay and conditions. The intensity of strike actions often varies from one sector to another; and from one country to another. Strike actions have been a recurring phenomenon in Nigerian's education sub-sector and as such, strike actions have led to several grievous consequences in the programme offerings in the nation and especially Technical education programme

Though strike is recognized in the Nigerian legal system, but its use is acceptable to the extent that it is properly used for the furtherance of legitimate union objectives. Strike becomes illegal in the following circumstances:

- i. When it deviates from its proper objective of settling a trade dispute between employers and workers;
- ii. When the method adopted for the strike is contrary to public order, such as arson or assault. Those involved could be charged under criminal code; and
- iii. When the means for the peaceful settlement of the disputes have been established by agreement or legislation, and the union fails to use these or embarks on a strike action without first exhausting those procedures (Clark, 2012).

Strike, despite being used as a tool by of trade or labour unions in compelling their employers to accept or not to accept terms of employment and physical conditions of work; there are still some employees or sectors that are not allowed to embark on strike because they are considered to be providing essential or sensitive services to the nation. Example of such include: members of all armed forces and the police.

Strike and its impact on Education in Nigeria

There are several forms of strike as documented in different literatures. In this context, the following types of strike are examined:

Jurisdictional Strike: this occurs when two unions argue about which one has jurisdiction to over a type of work and attempt to exert pressure upon the employer to allocate it to one or the other (Clark, 2012). This strike is a 'fall out' from the multiplicity of unions in a given profession or discipline. This strike is described as illegal as their employer is caught in the middle between the two warring unions.

Sympathy Strike: it is a form of strike that is embarked upon as solidarity for other union. It is described as sympathy strike because other unions who are not party to the original strike consent to strike in sympathy with the original union (Clark, 2012). It is an attempt to exert an indirect pressure upon the employer. This type of strike is common in tertiary institutions in the country where Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU) embarked on sympathy strike because of ASUU and vice versa.

Recognition Strike: this is a form of strike that is primarily geared at forcing the employer to recognize and deal with the union (Clark, 2012). In a country, there are several unions. Some of the unions are more recognized than the others. The perceived less recognized union will result to embarking on strike as a way of drawing the attention of their employers and the general public to recognize and deal with them. The strike actions sometimes embarked upon by the Non Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU) may be described as recognition strike as this has a way of drawing the attention of the government to recognize and deal with them, and not ASUU alone.

Economic Strike: this is one of the most popular forms of strike in Nigeria. It is the typical strike based on a demand for better wags, hour and working conditions than the employer is willing to grant (Clark, 2012). It is sometimes called 'bread and better strike'. The first strike embarked upon by ASUU in 1994 was on this ground and the recent strike actions embarked upon by ASUU, ASUP and COEASU was also based on economic considerations (that is, better wages/salaries and working conditions).

Wildcat Strike: it is described as a quick, sudden and unauthorized type of work stoppage. It is not approved by union leadership. It is often masterminded by a subgroup of employees who have not achieved

satisfaction though regular collective bargaining procedures.

Causes of Incessant Strike Actions in Nigeria

Strike actions are often caused by several factors and researchers over time have attempted to document the several causes of strike actions in the nation's educational sector. This section is devoted to examining the notable causes of strike actions in Nigeria.

A strike action is caused by the unfair treatment that workers receive from their employers (Clark, 2012). When employees perceived that they are not being treated fairly with respect to pay and condition of service, there is bound to be disagreement between the employees and the employers. For instance, Technical educators have set goals which they hope should be met by the organization/institution. If the institution failed to meet up with these goals, there may be impasse which may likely degenerate into strike actions. In some cases, workers in some cadres or lower ranks complained of victimization by those perceived to be on superior cadres or ranks. This has in no small measure affected the morale of staff and at times it degenerate into 'full-blown' strike.

Violation of legislation or rule has been identified as a notable cause of strike actions in the nation. The employment contract entered into between the employees and employer remains binding as long as the contract is on. When there is breach of contractual agreement by employer, there is bound to be impasse which may eventually climax in strike actions. The educators/teachers tend to rely on strike action as a last resort in pressing home their demands.

Another notable cause of strike actions is the poor application of collective bargaining. Collective bargaining has become an important mechanism for setting the procedures for the settlement of industrial disputes and also for resolving disputes when they inevitably occur. Most of the strike actions in Nigeria have resulted due to the poor application of the provisions of collective bargaining. For instance, the Nigerian Labour Congress went on warning strike in August, 2011 over non implementation of the new national minimum wage. The 2013 ASUU and ASUP strike actions were based on the poor application of the provisions of collective bargaining. The COEASU strike of 2014 that affected all Federal Colleges of Education also resulted from the failure to implement the provisions of collective bargaining.

Implications of strike on Technical Education Programme in Nigeria

Strike action have been perceived as resultant effect from the impasse between employers of labour and employees and this has obvious implications on the implementation Technical education programme in Nigeria. Some of these implications are examined in this section.

Strike actions often times bring about disruption in the institution's academic calendar (Kazeem & Ige, 2010). Once there is strike action, it will give room for calendar adjustment which will inevitably affect the smooth running of Technical education programme in the country (Olakunle, 2011). Once there is strike action, institutions/schools are forced to close down and there will be a temporary stoppage of teaching and learning activities in the concerned institutions. This temporary refusal of lecturers to work will in turn result in developing and redesigning new academic calendar in order to make up for the period. Due to this strike action, Technical education students may not be able to complete their academic work within the prescribed period as stated in the prospectus. For instance, a 4-year degree programme in Technical education may take more than 4 years due to the strike action as it is currently being experienced in the country.

The skills acquired by Technical education graduates are also greatly affected by the incessant strike actions in Nigeria (Edinyang & Ubi, 2013). There is no doubt that strike actions alter the normal skill acquisition process in Technical education. Technical education which is a skill based course requires no disruption in the process in order to guarantee easy transmission of skills. Once there is incessant strike actions, the skill acquisition process will be truncated and as such, Technical education students will be poorly prepared for the realities in the labour market. Researchers have often documented and emphasized the poor core skills possessed by Technical and Vocational education students/graduates and this may not be unconnected with the incessant strike actions in the country (Imeokparia & Ediagbonya, 2012; Usoro & Ogbuanya, 2012; Ediagbonya & Oyadongha, 2013).

Incessant strike actions have great implication on the stress level of Technical educators and students. Stress is often described as a constant phenomenon in the life of everybody. Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2013) defined stress as a structural imbalance within the individual as a result of deficiency or shortfall in the individual's expectations. Once there is strike, it has a tendency of leading to a shortfall in the expectation of both Technical education lecturers and students. In the case of technical education teacher/lecturer, their expected salaries will not be paid until the end of the strike because of the Government policy of 'no work, no pay'. In a similar vein, Technical education students' expectations may also be cut short. When all these happens, there will be a sort of structural imbalance within the lecturers and students; and this may lead to health related issues. In some cases, lecturers have passed on and some students have been involved in several unspeakable

acts (Imeokparia & Ediagbonya, 2013; Ubangari & Bako, 2014).

Strike actions have serious implication on the morale of Technical educators. Though strikes actions are embarked upon to achieve certain demands but when the periods extend longer than necessary, the morale of Technical educators may not be that high. Most lecturers may find it difficult to carry out their research work freely because of low morale which is a function of the prolonged strike actions. There is no doubt that workers may not find it easy to attend conferences, workshops or seminars during these periods due to low morale which is resulting from the incessant strike.

Strike actions have great implication on academic research in Technical education. Academic research is an integral aspect of education because of its role in revamping and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Technical education. Once there is incessant strike action, students and researchers may not be motivated to go into academic research. During this period, research students find it difficult to gain access to their supervisors and to even find students to administer research instruments to. This has a way of negatively affecting the volume of research works and thereby leading to a state of comatose in Technical education research.

Incessant strike actions may not be too healthy for the equipment and facilities used in the teaching and learning of Technical education. It is a well established fact that Technical education is geared towards skill acquisition; and for one to be efficient and proficient in the field of Technical education, there must be functional equipment and facilities on ground. Once there is strike action, these equipment and facilities are abandoned and they are not maintained in line with the guidelines for maintaining equipment and facilities. Most of the equipment and facilities begin to wear out or depreciate. Some of these equipment and facilities need to be cleaned and oiled from time to time to avoid rusting or depreciation.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the implications of incessant strike actions on Technical education programme in Nigeria. The paper examined relevant conceptual frameworks relating to strike actions and some notable strike actions in Nigeria. Based on the review of relevant literatures that have been done, it is essential to conclude that strike actions have great implications on smooth running of Technical education programme in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Based on the relevant literatures that have been reviewed, the following recommendations are therefore advanced.

- i. All the stakeholders and parties to collective bargaining should comply with the resolution of the bargaining;
- ii. Government should ensure adequate provision of infrastructures and facilities in various institutions;
- iii. Government should ensure adequate provision of skilled manpower in the various institutions;
- iv. Government should strive to develop e-learning programme in Technical education in order to guarantee uninterrupted academic exercise; and
- v. Employers of labour should devise appropriate motivational strategies to motivate their employees for greater productivity.

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