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## Exploring the Triggers and Strategies for Tackling Industrial Strikes in Public University System in Nigeria

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### Abstract:

*The public university system in Nigeria suffers from perennial interruptions of academic sessions due to strike actions frequently embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The purpose of the perennial strikes is mostly to get the government to better fund the public university system so as to create the enabling environment, which would capacitate it towards greater performance. Thus, this study explored the triggers and strategies for tackling industrial strikes in the public university system in Nigeria. Drawing from the findings made in this study, recommendations on the appropriate approaches towards addressing the perennial ASUU strikes in the Nigeria's public university system were proffered with a view to revitalizing the system as well as re-focusing it to effectively contribute to the national development of Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Industrial Conflict, Industrial Strike, Industrial Harmony and University System.

## **1. Introduction**

Universities are veritable citadels of learning for knowledge production towards stimulating the knowledge economy for the transformation and development of the society. As Awuzie (2010), asseverates that “university occupies a very strategic place in the production of high level manpower for the sustenance of any nation. Universities represent the most important part of the educational system because it is at this level the future is not only anticipated but made through the kind of knowledge generated and disseminated to all other members of society”. The World Bank (2000) has also underscored the nexus between university education and national development, when it indicated that “university education has a positive relationship with economic growth and development and that the development of nations in the 21st Century depends on the quality and quantity of this level of education in different countries.”

On a global level, universities are expected to contribute to the international competitiveness of nations through innovative scientific knowledge generation that is capable of engendering wealth creation for the sustainable development of nations. This is because education is the base for societal development. In this regard therefore, Gibbons and his colleagues (1994), argue that science has become central to the generation of wealth and wellbeing and can no longer be regarded as an autonomous space clearly demarcated from other parts of society. The growth of knowledge industries is one driving force in the erosion of the demarcation between science and society.

However, the positive role that university plays in the development of the society can only be realised only when universities are properly funded to create the enabling environment that would stimulate effective teaching and research. But the situation in the Nigerian public university

system is different, as it has consistently been rocked by crisis of underfunding. Thus, the system has largely been plagued by industrial strikes of different intensities and magnitudes provoked by disagreement whether between the labour unions within university and their local management or between the unions and the government. This ugly situation in the Nigerian public university system has become a vicious circle and it is reflective of the crises of nationhood that the Nigerian state is trying to grapple with since 53 years of its existence. Incontrovertibly, incidences of strikes have been negatively affecting the growth and development of public university system in Nigeria to the extent that academic activities in the system have been paralysed repeatedly, sometimes up till a maximum of six months and a minimum of one week. This, obviously, has wider implications for the economic development of Nigeria as it is very obvious that there is a disconnect between the public university system and economic development in Nigeria.

Strikes have continued to persist in the Nigerian public university system primarily because the government lacks the sincerity and commitment towards honouring agreements it willfully enter into with labour unions especially with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). As Tyessi (2013) rightly observe:

Much more disturbing is the predilection of the government for renegeing on agreements freely entered into with university teachers as was the case when the university sector was rocked by protracted industrial unrest between 1994 and 1996 as a result of the government's refusal to honour the terms of the FGN/ASUU agreement of September 1992.

Similarly, Olujide, Akindele & Olorunleke (2006) have averred that, "university authorities do not always pay attention to unions when they raise issues, which concern the union members and the society at large." Therefore, the authoritarian

response of the Nigerian government to the strikes has been responsible for the perennial nature of ASUU strikes transforming them into a vicious cycle of crises. More often than not, ASUU strikes do not yield much positive results and this often leads to further strike actions.

It is a global practice in collective bargaining that strike is a tool for resolving industrial disputes as well as enforcing compliance to agreement entered into between labour unions and their management/employer. This global practice is usually not adhered to by the Nigerian state, as it often put up fierce resistance to the agitations of striking unions, which makes most ASUU strikes to continue unabated, but the realization by the government that strikes have profound negative impact on academic activities in the public university system in Nigeria, ultimately makes the government to concede to the demands of the unions. Studies have for instance, underscored the negative impact of strikes on the public university system in Nigeria (see Jega, 1994; Onyeonoru, 2001; Kazeem and Ige, 2010 and Olukunle, 2011). Without prevaricating, the perennial nature of ASUU strikes in Nigeria's public university system is indicative of the fact that both ASUU and the government do not understand the scale and dimension of the negative impact of strikes on the public university system and this has been the trajectory of the cycle of strikes in Nigeria's public university system.

Against the above background, this paper explores the triggers and strategies for tackling the protracted industrial strikes plaguing the public university system in Nigeria. This, is with a view to be able to propose some policy recommendations that would assist in ameliorating the conditions precipitating ASUU strikes such that industrial harmony can be enthroned in the Nigeria's public university system.

## **2. Conceptual Exploration and Literature Review**

### **2.1. Concept of Strike:**

Strike remains a key element of industrial conflicts employed by most public and private organisations world over. Conflict is inherent in every human relations as well as in the internal dynamics of organisations as it can be observed from Hyman's (1989) definition of industrial conflict as an obstruction of normal work situation in which workers refuse to attend their workplace assiduously, perform their work conscientiously, and obey instruction submissively. Industrial conflict is a situation of disagreement between two parties (Amusan, 1996). This situation is characterised by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences and reach an agreement on issues of common interest. Industrial conflicts manifest in various forms as highlighted by Parker et al. (1977):

It may take the form of strike, picketing, boycotts, overtime ban, intimidation and lockout, depending on prevailing circumstances. Although each of the above variety of industrial conflicts, disputes or actions have grim consequences on the productivity of an organization, the strike action remains the most unpalatable and potent weapon in the arsenal of labour. This explains in part why to the ordinary person, industrial conflict and strike are synonymous. A strike or lockout, when in force signifies a complete breakdown of collective bargaining.

It is very evident from the above analysis that strike is a form and a strategy of industrial conflict, which is normally employed by labour unions as a tool to coerce the management to the negotiation table with a view to mutually finding lasting solution towards resolving industrial conflict. Strike also refers to cessation of work by a body of employees or a labour union representing the interests of its employees in an organisation, due to a stalemate in collective bargaining between this group of employees and their management or employer. There are

many factors that engenders industrial conflicts, which Mullins (1999) classified as three potential sources of industrial conflict. They are:

- Individual - such as attitude, personality characteristics of particular person, needs, illness and stress.
- Group - such as group skills, the informal organization and group norms.
- Organization - such as communications, authority structure, leadership style and management behaviour.

Michael Poole posit that a strike is a typical indicator of industrial conflict, which has four dimensions, (1986): (i) frequency, the number of work stoppages in a given unit of analysis over a specific period of time; (ii) breadth, the number of workers who participate in work stoppages; (iii) duration, the length of stoppage, usually in man-days of work lost; and (iv) impact, the number of working days lost through stoppages.

## **2.2. Understanding Union Militancy and the Genesis of ASUU Strikes in Public University System in Nigeria**

Generally, there are many factors that precipitate labour unions to resort to strikes, especially after they have exhausted all the official and non-official peaceful means available to them to get their demands met. Clearly, strike is the militancy state of industrial conflict, which involves stoppage or withdrawal of workers service/work from their normal employment contract with the aim of getting the management to the negotiation table. From the 1990s onwards, scholarly attention has been paid to the increase in workers' militancy and organising strategies in the newly industrialised countries (see Hutchison and Brown, 2001; Munck, 2002 and Silver, 2003). For instance, Lee (2007) in her recent study on labour protests in China tried to provide a connected account by comparing laid-off state workers in the North and migrant peasant workers in South China. According to her, it was only after the arbitration procedure had failed to protect workers' legal rights that the

victims were then forced to ‘radicalisation’ by walking out onto the streets. Lee’s thesis shows that the use of strike or radical measures by labour unions as a strategy remains only the last option available to them to force their employer or management to the dialogue table.

Studies have also shown that labour disputes and union militancy are often perceived to have political overtones, even though the overwhelming majority of the strikes are in the private sector due to collective negotiations in which economic grievances are the underlying factors (Cohen, 1974 and Otofo, 1983). But why do politics underlie union militancy, especially in the public sector like that of Nigeria? Nelson (1991) provides an instructive answer to the foregoing question by pointing out that “the type of political regime—ranging from democracy to dictatorship—significantly affects the way in which industrial relations develop.” It is therefore plausible to argue that since the Nigerian government is the largest employer of labour in the country, which by right makes it to continue to be a major player in wage determination. As such, the employment relations between the government and its employees, who are often represented by their labour unions is bound to be political, principally because of the incompatible interests pursued by both parties. While labour unions agitate for improved salaries and welfare for their members, the government also tries to resist the demand of labour unions to save cost. As Neil Chamberlain, one of the great figures in industrial relations, wrote in 1959 that “unions’ chief contribution to their members’ welfare has been to free them from the tyranny of arbitrary decision or discriminatory action in the work place” (2011).

Unarguably, union militancy in the Nigerian public university system began in 1973 with the interference of the Federal Military Government in the administration of the public university system in Nigeria, through the promulgation of obnoxious decrees in the system, which subsequently led to the radicalisation of ASUU. Onyeonoru (2004) traced the origin

of the perennial ASUU strikes ravaging the public university system in Nigeria as follow:

The 1970s were marked with events that may have remote bearings with the 1996 ASUU strike in the area of the condition of service. These include the trade dispute between the Governing Councils of Nigerian universities and the local branches of the National Association of University Teachers in 1973, which led to a strike by the university teachers. The dispute was about the review of conditions of service. In spite of the efforts of the university councils to secure improved pay and conditions centrally, the Federal Ministry of Education prevaricated. Even after the Councils and individual local teachers' associations had agreed on specific increases in 1973, the Ministry refused to accept the outcome of this collective bargaining. The violation of the power of the Council to negotiate and determine the conditions of employment at the local level became the point of contention in the strike of April 1973.

However, the 1973 strike embarked upon by the university teachers' was crushed by the Federal Military Government. Onyeonuro (2004) also captured the development as thus:

The government's handling of the 1973 conflict was coercive. The then Head of State would not differentiate between the functions of the Visitor and those of the Head of Government and Council. The university teachers were ordered back to work during the conflict and the widely reported humiliation engendered by this had a profound effect on the morale of the university teachers. University professors had to queue up to sign registers, and write their VCs, promising to be of good behaviour at the pain of being sacked or ejected. The sense of security and of total commitment to academic pursuit was irretrievably shattered. That was the beginning of the loss experienced by the university teachers in their relative position in the pay structure of Nigeria.



The capitulation of the university teachers as a result of their humiliation by the military government made them to go underground for some time without agitating for improved condition of service. But again in the 1980s, the university teachers woke up from their slumber to agitate for improved salaries and condition of service. Onyeonuro (2004) reported the situation as follow:

One of the attempts in the 1980s to rescue the university system from imminent collapse was made through the 1988 strike of the university teachers in which the conditions of service of university staff reverberated. One of the demands of the university teachers that led to the strike was that the 20 percent differential in the University Salary Structure (USS), enjoyed by university staff comparative to other public sector employees but which was largely eroded by the implementation of SAP, should be restored. ASUU's position was to be confirmed by all Accreditation and Visitation Panels on the university crisis set up by the Federal Government, including the Longe Commission Report, which stated that "the problem of brain drain was primarily a result of the erosion of the status and income of academics in the unified salary grading systems in the 1970s". What was left of the disparity, which served to attract bright minds to the system was closed up in the Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS), then implemented by the Babangida administration. Hence, conflicts located in the loss in pay and status of the university employees consequent upon the Udoji awards were to reoccur in the 1983 negotiations with the Federal government and became a matter for dispute between the Federal Government and the university teachers in 1988.

Furthermore, Professor Akinkugbe similarly noted:

The epidemic of amendments to erstwhile well-intentioned Decrees has wrecked havoc on the sanctity of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in many areas. Take the National University Commission Decree 1 of 1974 that took care to spell out the spirit and intent of an ideal intermediary

between government and universities, whereas subsequent amendments, embodied in Decrees 49 of 1988 and 10 of 1993 consolidated its powers. The Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions Decree 16 of 1985 and a subsequent Amendment of this in 1993 further empowered the NUC and eroded university autonomy. Then there is the classic case of the Academic Staff Union Of Universities (ASUU), regarded through the 90s as a thorn in the flesh of government. Decree 26 of 1988 proscribed it, Decree 36 of 1990 revoked that proscription, and Decree 24 of 1992 again proscribed and forbade it from participating in trade union activities (2001:3).

However, the cumulative effects of the obnoxious decrees of the successive military administrations towards the Nigerian university system began to manifest its dysfunctional consequences on the system starting from the mid 1980s. As Onyeonuru (2004) rightly observe, “signs of collapse (of public universities), which began to show by the 1980s became evident in the 1990s in the form of acute shortage of research and learning facilities for both staff and students, dilapidation of existing but often outdated infrastructure, and unmotivated workforce (academic and non-academic) and the arbitrary interference in university governance by military governments and their authoritarian handling of university matters”. It is pertinent therefore to argue that the high-handedness of the military government in the administration of public university system, which was marked by the dishing out of obnoxious policies towards the university system; had greatly affected the growth of the system. Such policies include: the mass sack of foreign academics from the Nigerian universities, removal of subsidy on feeding of students, reduction of government funding, indiscriminate arrests of academics that were critics of the military government, proscription of ASUU, sacking and imposition of university administrators at will among others.

Similarly, Professor Atahiru Jega, a former ASUU President observe the consequence of the above development, when he noted that “amidst the proscription of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) by the Federal Military Government in 1988 and other abuses, over 1000 academics had to quit the Nigerian universities” (1994). This is of course, a very sad development and to say that the intervention of the military government into the public university system laid the foundation for the crises and decay ravaging the Nigeria’s public university system is not an overstatement. In fact, the successive military administrations did not only denigrate the academia in their calculated attempt to show their superiority to the academia, they also tactically crippled and suffocated public universities in Nigeria by massively cutting down funding to the universities and the results are the societal ills that we are now trying to grapple with as a nation. As such, public universities in Nigeria have become haven for cultic activities, factories for producing half-baked graduates and the university campuses have also become a hide-out for idle and unproductive academics.

Generally, the interference of the military government in the running of the university system, systematically and gradually derailed the focus of university education in Nigeria and this has consequently led to the hydra headed crises that the system is submerged into until this contemporary times. It also created suspicion and rivalry between ASUU and the military government which led to occasional breakdown in communication between these parties. One of such break-downs in communication between the military government and ASUU was the strike embarked upon by ASUU in 1992, which was meant to demand for the restoration and revitalization of the Nigerian university system from the state of comatose that the military has punched it into. Concerning this development, Onyenoru (2004) posits that:

The 1992 strike of ASUU, in particular, culminated in negotiations on the issues in dispute and the signing that year of a collective agreement between ASUU and the Federal Government of Nigeria regarded by ASUU as being of great value. The agreement was to be reviewed every three years to reflect social and economic changes including inflationary trends and costs of living. The Agreement freely reached and duly signed by the government and ASUU unfortunately became a basis for intensive contest between the parties, so that up to 2003 there has rarely been a session without an industrial conflict, sometimes protracted, such as those of 1996 and 2002/2003 that stretched for about six months.

On the whole, ASUU has embarked on about 16 strike actions, mostly to agitate for improved condition of service for its members as well as better funding for the revitalization of public universities in Nigeria. Below is the chronicle of ASUU strikes that have taken place in the public university system in Nigeria:

S/no	Year	Reason for strike	Period
1.	1973	Demand by university teachers for the review of their condition of service. The disagreement was between university teachers and the Governing Councils of university.	1 week
2.	1981	Demand for improved condition of service, which led to setting up of the Coockey's Commission.	6 months
3.	1988	Demand for improved condition of service	2 weeks
4.	1992	Demand for improved condition of service including improved funding of public universities.	6 months
5.	1993	Refusal of government to fully implement the 1992 agreement it reached with ASUU.	3 months
6.	1994	Refusal of Government to fully implement the 1992 agreement with ASUU and demand for increased salary.	4 months

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7.	1995	1995 ASUU strike for the review of the 1992 Agreement.	3 months
8.	1996	Refusal to fully implement the 1992 FGN/ASUU agreement by the government and demand for better salaries.	6 months
9.	1999	Refusal of government to implement the October 26, 1999 signed Agreement	5 months
10..	2001	Strike over stalemate in the negotiation. Agreement signed on June 30, 2001	3 months
11	2002/2003	Refusal of government to implement the 2001 Agreements	6 months
12.	2006	Refusal of government to implement the 2001 Agreements	2 months
13	2007	Refusal of government to implement the 2001 Agreements	3 months
13.	2009	Refusal of government to endorse 2006 agreement	4 months (24 <sup>th</sup> June-December 2009).
14.	2011-2012	Refusal of Federal Government to implement 2009 agreement reached with ASUU.	2 months (4 <sup>th</sup> December 2011-24 <sup>th</sup> January). 2012.
15.	2012	Refusal of Federal Government to implement 2009 agreement reached with ASUU.	2 weeks
16.	2013	Refusal of Federal Government to implement 2009 agreement reached with ASUU.	5 months (July 1 <sup>st</sup> 2013- December 17, 2013).

Table 1

**Source:** Field data, 2013

Poignantly, the numerous ASU strikes have had very debilitating consequences on the public university system in the country, as Umokoro (2013) rightly observed:

Incessant ASUU strikes result, in the long run, in poor educational quality, and consequent critical shortage of skilled manpower; disillusioned youths who lose interest in tertiary education and embrace wrong, materialistic values; poor political leadership, and the entrenchment of mediocrity at all levels of our national life; half-baked teachers who are re-

cycled into the educational system with devastating consequences; general socio-political stagnation and international relegation in the comity of nations.

Furthermore, the world bank (1994) has identified the crises in the Nigeria's university system as: (a) decline public expenditure; (b) deteriorated infrastructure / facilities / equipments for teaching, research and learning – these are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry-out the basic functions of academics; (c) the erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom; (d) the increasing rate of graduate unemployment; (e) brain-drain; and student unrest and constant strikes by both students and academic staff.

### **3. Causes of ASUU Strikes in Public Universities in Nigeria**

Some of the major factors engendering ASUU strikes in public universities in Nigeria are discussed below:

#### **3.1 Poor wages and condition of service**

The demand for increased wages and salaries by labour unions in the Nigeria public service including the Academic Staff Union of Universities underlies all incidences of strikes in Nigerian universities. ASUU's wage demand is often occasioned by the fact that there is the need to make the salary and welfare packages of the university lecturers attractive so as to discourage the crisis of brain drain that rocked public universities in the country in the early 1990's, a situation that led to the best Nigerian academics leaving the country for other countries where the salary and welfare packages are attractive. The Nigerian government remains the largest employer of labour in Nigeria and by this she determines to a great extent the salaries and wages of her employees, including those in the

public university system. Studies on industrial strikes in Nigeria, reveals that the Nigerian government has been and continues to be an active participant in wage determination and price movement. Since wage and price variables are important explanatory variables in any strike model (Sonubi, 1973 and Otobo 1984).

Nigeria, being a country that is abundantly blessed with huge natural and human resources should normally not have difficulty in ensuring adequate welfare as well as a robust condition of service for its workers in the public universities as it is done in most countries around the world, for the primary purpose of stimulating the efficiency of the academia to effectively contribute to national development. However, the poor management of the country's resources and insincerity on the part of the government has largely contributed to its inability to adequately fund public universities in the country. This attitude is also responsible for the general poor state of the conditions of service of the academic staff in the university system. The teaching profession in the university system has been relegated to the background and often treated with disdain, when compared with the private sector, where a fresh university graduate earns about five hundred thousand (N500.000) monthly, which is about four thousand Dollars (3,500USD). This situation has made scholars like Akindutire (2004) to vehemently condemn a situation where a young graduate who is fortunate to take up a job outside the unified public service immediately starts to earn twice his professor's annual income.

The inability of the government to guarantee better salaries and condition of service as well as provide adequate research grants to the universities has often resulted in brain drain- a situation where some Nigerian academics have been moving outside the country in search of better salaries and improved welfare conditions. As a result, many universities are left with young, inexperienced and insufficiently trained staff

who lack the necessary mentors and role models to guide them (Saint, 1995). Professor Assisi Asobie, a former ASUU chairman, has also painted the situation thus:

Before the 1992 ASUU-FGN Agreement, the average Nigerian Professor's pay as a percentage of his counterpart in Botswana stood at an embarrassing level of 0.005 percent. As a result of the Agreement, the corresponding relative percentage came to 32 percent. But by 1996, inflation and related unfavourable socio-economic environment relegated the Nigerian professor's relative position to about 4 percent of his colleagues' pay in Botswana. The claim by Nigerian academics that their condition of service was the worst in Africa was driven home through a comparison with that of their colleagues in West African countries. While a Ghanaian Professor earned about 228,534.00 per annum, his Nigerian counterpart earned 49,922.00 (1996).

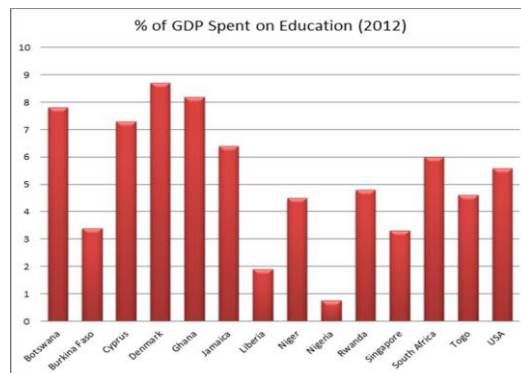
The consequence of this development is reported by Smah (2007), when he quoted Professor Joseph Stiglitz, the 2001 Nobel Prize winner in Economics, who, while delivering a lecture at the first Dr. Pius Okigbo Memorial Lecture series in Enugu said that there is a particular university in the U.S that has over 25 Nigerian Professors. He therefore submitted that the above pointer is instructive for any serious-minded government that wants to address the issue of brain-drain. This revelation is indeed a very sad development and this makes the issue of poor wages and condition of service to be one of the banes of public university system in Nigeria which needs to be addressed immediately if the system is to be capacitated to effectively play its role in the development and transformation of the Nigerian state. Incontrovertibly, salaries of the academic staff in the public university system have improved since the Federal Government and ASUU reached agreement in January 2009. This improvement in salaries could not have been possible without the declaration of many strikes by the union,



which forced the government to agree to increase the salaries of public university staff.

### 3.2 Funding Constraints

Poor funding of the public universities by the Nigerian government remains a major precipitant of strikes in the public university system. Both the federal and state governments are major financiers of the universities owned by them and they provide up to about 80% of the funds for running the public universities. In spite of the government funding to the public universities, findings have shown that the funds are still not adequate to run the universities optimally as paucity of funding of public universities is seriously undermining the capacities of public universities to meet their objectives. For instance, Awuzie (2010) posits that the crisis of funding in the universities has worsened to the extent that vice-chancellors could barely pay salaries and allowances. Arikewuyo (2004) also reported that “since the advent of democracy in 1999, the funding of education had dropped considerably.” A careful examination of government’s allocation in the annual budget of Nigeria reveals that allocation to the sector has consistently swung like a pendulum from between 8% and 9% and the highest allocation was 11%. A graphic illustration is presented below:



Source: ASUU Newsletter, September, 20, 2013.

The above chart illustrates the allocation of funds to universities in fourteen countries for the year 2012. Denmark has the highest allocation while Nigeria is the lowest with a budget of 9% (N121, Billion) to all the 36 federal government owned universities. This statistics is not only unimpressive but it also shows that the Nigerian government has no interest in the development of its universities. The same government that has been shying away from its responsibility to its university; through the AMCON the sum of N5 trillion (\$30 billion) was released by the CBN to bail out some liquidated banks in Nigeria in 2008 and the government also gave out N100 Billion to Nollywood in the same year. These institutions that were bailed out by the government are not owned by it but the universities that it owns are being neglected without the government given them adequate attention in terms of funding.

According to statistics published in ASUU Newsletter (2013), it indicated that Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) for the year 2012 was 262.2 billion USD, out of which allocation to the education sector for 2012 was 1.96 billion USD. In the 2013 budget, federal allocation to all 39 federal universities, all federal polytechnics, all federal colleges of educations, all federal government colleges and unity schools, etc. is 2.69 billion USD, which is far less than 2013 budget of two universities in the United States of America, the Penn State University which is 4.42b billion USD and that of University of Texas which is 2.48 billion USD.

Research findings have alarmingly indicated that there are about 71,000 Nigerians studying in universities in Ghana paying about N155 billion annually as tuition fees as against the annual budget of N121 billion for all federal universities in Nigeria (Olanipekun, 2011). This is indeed a very sad development- Nigeria, a nation that prides itself as the most populous black nation in the world as well as the giant of Africa, yet it cannot do the right thing that is expected of it. Clearly, the Nigerian public university system requires

effective and adequate funding to be able to effectively realise its objectives. The need for adequate funding of the Nigerian public universities has been stressed repeatedly by research findings and even in public discourses. For instance, Ojo (2013) has stressed this need that “Nigeria’s education sector needs to be properly funded given the primacy role the sector plays in human capital development. The nine per cent earmarked for the sector in this year’s budget (2013) is a far cry from the UNESCO’s stipulated 26 per cent. It is impossible to make a brick without straw. Proper funding of our public academic institutions is non-negotiable if we hope to tame the rising number of schools’ drop-outs.”

Essentially, the task of funding public universities in Nigeria cannot and should not be expected to be shouldered alone by the federal and state governments because of the enormous responsibilities that they have to grapple with and they being the largest employer of labour in Nigeria. Therefore, it is very imperative that managers of public universities in Nigeria should strive to be more innovative and creative in terms of raising their internal revenue generation profiles so as to meet up with their funding challenges. Private sector can also assist in this regard. This can be done through the enactment of legislation by the National and State Houses of Assembly, which would compel the private sector, especially the multinational companies as well the commercial banking sector to contribute certain percentage of their annual profits to the government funding agencies such as Education Task Fund (ETF) and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND). Civil servants can also be made to contribute a certain percentage of their salaries to the funding of both federal and state universities. This will go a long way to making funds available for the development of the public university system in Nigeria.

### **3.3 Insincerity and lack of commitment towards honouring agreement**

Another major factor that trigger-off strikes in the public university system in Nigeria is the insincerity of the government in honoring agreements that it willfully entered into with ASUU and even with other unions in the system. This attitude has often strained the relationship between the unions and government thereby forcing the unions to declare strike action as a last resort. As Bens (1997) reported, conflict is the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desires are likely to be denied, or been denied. The denial of the demands of the union which they so consider as their rights by the government or the university management have often made the unions to embark on strikes. The July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 strike embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities is a case in point. According to a press conference organised by the union to officially announce the declaration of this strike, the ASUU National President, Dr. Isa Fagge explained:

Before now, there has been this issue of the implementation of the key issues contained in the 2009 agreement we entered into with the Federal Government. We have had several meetings and deliberations to let government understand why these issues must be resolved but it is like the more we meet and deliberate, the messier the issue gets. One of the issues that needed to be addressed was basically that of the Academic Earned Allowance. This earned allowance, and other issues, had dragged on until government then agreed to write an MOU with the union. But as we speak, there has been nothing to show that government was committed to an MOU it also willingly wrote to better the university sector. It is in this regard that we are embarking on an indefinite strike (Punch, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2013).

Some of the key areas of the 2009 FGN/ASUU agreement identified by ASUU are as follows:

- Funding requirements for revitalization of Nigerian universities,
- Federal Government assistance to State universities,
- Establishment of NUPEMCO (Nigerian University Pension Management Commission),
- Progressive increase in annual budgetary allocation to education to 26% between 2009 and 2020 and earned allowances,
- Amendment of the pension/retirement age of academics on the professorial cadre from 65 to 70 years,
- Reinstatement of prematurely dissolved Governing Councils,
- Transfer of Federal Government landed property to universities, and
- Setting up of research development council and provision of research equipment to laboratories and classrooms in the universities.

Overtime, the federal government of Nigeria has consistently demonstrated insincerity and lack of commitment towards honouring agreements that it willfully enters into with the labour unions, not only in the public universities but also other unions in the public sector. This is clearly the reason why most of the labour unions in the public sector go on strike by turns to the extent that the sector is replete of strikes of different intensities and magnitudes and the government has demonstrated the highest inability and lack of commitment towards managing these numerous strikes. Evidently, the Nigerian government has consistently betrayed the trust that labour unions repose on it and this trust betrayal is what usually makes the unions to resort to repeated strike actions in order to force government either to listen to their grievances or to implement agreements it reached with the unions. The consequence of this trust betrayal has been succinctly captured by Worchel and Lundgren (1991), when they pointed out that,

“if the relationship is not completely destroyed after the trust betrayal, it is changed forever...until that trust is rebuilt into the relationship, the conflict will always be “exceedingly difficult” to resolve.” This explains the reason why ASUU strikes have become protracted and perennial to the extent that there is hardly any academic session that ASUU will not embark on a strike action.

### **3.4 Infrastructural Deficit**

Generally, there exists paucity of infrastructures in public universities in Nigeria due to inadequate funding as Ajayi & Ekundayo (2009) observed that “the apparent shortage of fund available to the university system has been responsible for declining library, social and laboratory facilities in recent years.” The state of facilities and infrastructures in the Nigerian public universities is appalling to the extent that some universities in the country are often referred to as ‘*glorified secondary schools*’ with dilapidated and inadequate infrastructural facilities. As Monehin (2003) pointed out that “infrastructural facilities are very germane in educational institutions, particularly in the teaching-learning process”. The common infrastructural facility problems in the Nigerian public universities include: inadequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, student hostels, staff offices and residential accommodation, information and communication technologies (ICTs) among others.

The NUC (2006) reported that the presidential visitation panel that looked into the operations of all federal universities between 1999 and 2003 revealed that academic and physical facilities at the universities were in deplorable states with insufficient lecture theatres/halls, laboratories and so on. With this appalling situation, there is no doubt that these universities will require supernatural power to be able to achieve the objectives for which they have been set up for. Chuta (1995) also observed that the hostel room shortage has

become so acute that a black market racket had developed. In many institutions, buses for students have broken down beyond repair, while even electricity and good drinking water are not assured on a daily basis. Olagbemi (2010) also posited that “overcrowding and inadequate funding has always been pointed as factors responsible for decline in quality of education in Nigeria”. It is regrettable that there are no constructive efforts been taken both by the government and the university administration to address the problem of infrastructural deficits in the Nigerian public university system so as to reposition the universities for better performances. Clearly, addressing the problem of infrastructural deficits in the public universities has been one of the cardinal goals of most ASUU strikes.

#### **4 The Way Forward**

In order to deal with the protracted industrial strikes plaguing the public university system in Nigeria, the following policy recommendations are suggested:

- a). The Nigerian government should progressively improve funding to the public universities so as to revitalize the infrastructural deficits in the system. This will help to provide the equipments and facilities needed to create the enabling teaching and learning environment that would stimulate effective learning in Nigeria’s public university system.
- b). A national summit on how to raise the internal generated revenue of public universities should be urgently conveyed by the government, private sector, managers of public universities, ASUU and other stake holders in the education sector. This is because funding of university world over is a shared responsibility of all.
- c). The National Universities Commission (NUC) should re-focus the vision and philosophy establishing public universities

through a holistic review of the curricula of academic programmes in public university system with a view to making their programmes functional and skill acquisition based. This will assist public universities to produce the high quality manpower needed for the country's economic development drive.

d). Government must show that it is responsible by demonstrating a sense of commitment and sincerity towards honouring agreements it enters into with labour unions. This is necessary for maintaining industrial harmony in the Nigeria's public sector.

e). The Federal Government should come up with an education marshal plan which would clearly set the agenda for refocusing and revitalizing the entire education sector in Nigeria.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

The primary aim of this study has been to explore the triggers of industrial strikes in Nigeria's public university system and to propose some workable strategies for taming the problem of strikes plaguing the system. On a descriptive level, it was found out that the perennial ASUU strikes have had more profound negative impact on the public university system to the extent that the perceived progress recorded so far in the system has been quantitative and not qualitative. Therefore, findings from this study imply that ASUU strikes are very costly on the development of the university system. The study therefore echoed the importance of adequate funding of the public universities in Nigeria as a condition that is precedent for revitalizing and repositioning the system for better performance.

It is pertinent therefore, to state that as long as the government, private sector, the managers of public universities in Nigeria and ASUU would not synergise to find a lasting solution to the problem of funding of public universities; strikes



would continue to ravage the system. As Professor Akinkugbe (2001:3) wrote in his article on “crisis in Nigerian university” that, “central to decay and desecration (of the Nigerian public universities) is funding and it does not need a gift of prophetic wisdom to surmise that unless this is addressed positively and aggressively there can be no turnaround in the status of Nigerian universities.” There is therefore no gainsaying in the fact that the only alternative solution to the perennial strikes ravaging public universities in Nigeria is for the system to be better funded so that it can produce the high quality manpower and the scientific breakthroughs needed for the country’s economic development drive.

## **6. Implications**

This study investigated the protracted nature of industrial strikes plaguing the public university system in Nigeria with a view to proposing some workable strategies towards addressing the problem. This study is therefore extremely important to the managers of public universities, federal and states government, university based labour unions and other stakeholders in the Nigeria’s public university system for the following reasons:

- a. It will promote a better understanding of the issues that engender strikes in the Nigeria’s public university system.
- b. It will also give insights on how strikes can be sustainably managed in order to ensure industrial harmony in the public university system in Nigeria.
- c. The findings and recommendations of this study will also go a long way in revitalizing and repositioning public universities in Nigeria for better performance as well as stimulate them to contribute effectively to national development.
- d. Finally, the study would also help to articulate the shared responsibility of government, university

administrators, university based unions, academia, private sector and other stakeholders in the funding of public universities in the country.

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