

ASUU STRIKES AND THE PROSPECTS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

HOW DO WE TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS BY LECTURERS IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Nigerian universities have faced industrial actions since the years of the military governments. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was established in 1978. Since then, it has regularly gone on strikes. Some hope was held that the introduction of civilian government would turn things around, but ASUU went on strike almost every year from 2001 to 2013. In the 24 years, since 1999, the body has gone on strike in 17 of them for a combined period of 4 years and 8 months.¹

The key factor behind ASUU strikes is revenue, with Nigeria's educational sector considerably underfunded, far below the recommended 15-20% benchmark for budgetary allocation to education. In fact, at 8-10%, Nigeria has one of the lowest percentages of budgetary allocation to education even among other African countries.²

The persistent down tools are hurting the Nigerian higher educational system, with the academic calendar often extending years longer, and the youth losing a significant proportion of their productive years waiting to conclude their programmes.

In a dwindling economy, Nigerians are concerned about the impact of strikes, insufficient government funding, and continuous increases in costs that are taking university education beyond the reach of the youth.

This issue guide is designed to guide the Literary Renaissance Foundation's (LRF) civic engagement discussion on the question: How can we have an improved and uninterrupted tertiary education system and support our youth in the face of persistent strikes and a declining economy?

Option One: Emphasise more responsible leadership.

Nigerians believe that administrators in our country, including university and political officeholders, have proved to be too unreliable, unaccountable, and out of touch with the concerns of citizens.

For instance, how universities have managed and do manage government allocations and internally generated revenue do not often get publicised for accountability. At the government level, we usually have to deal with the malaise of a round peg in a square hole with people appointed to sensitive positions that they have little knowledge about or competence to deliver, The children of top government officials go to study and graduate abroad while

¹ <https://www.icirnigeria.org/2023-nigerian-public-universities-mark-another-year-without-asuu-strike/>

² Nwanyanwu, D. H. et al. (2023) The Impact of Academic Staff Union of Universities' Strikes on Nigerian Students. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Education* 10(1), pp. 110-122. doi:10.18844/ijire.v10i1.8961

the children of the common man languish in academic system punctuated by persistent strikes.

This option holds that more stringent regulations should be enforced on those in public office to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsibility among officeholders in universities and government.

But, this may create increased tensions while some may feel that it interferes with their rights.

Actions	Drawbacks
Require universities to publicly publish annual financial and state-of-the-university reports.	This may lead to increased tensions between ASUU and the government and create a new form of problem in an already problematic situation.
Government should appoint only academics to ministerial and other critical positions related to education.	Dishonest and corrupt academics may still end up being appointed to occupy such positions, while effective administrators are disenfranchised because they are non-academic.
University senates should establish systems that ensure proper checks and balances in the financial management of their respective institutions.	Such systems may still be circumvented by powerful individuals and vested interests while maintaining an appearance of being functional.
Citizens should pressure their representatives to pass legislation banning any elected officials from sending their children/wards to universities abroad.	Politicians and public officeholders might feel that this infringes on their right to send their children to university wherever they choose.
What else can be done to ensure more responsible leadership?	What are some drawbacks to consider?

Option Two: Help youth choose more options.

As a society, we have come to believe that university education is the only available path. Yet many Nigerians have become successful individuals without the opportunity to further their studies at a university.

With a strong and effective primary and secondary education, some of our youth can go on to pursue other paths such as vocational schools and learning a trade. In the long run, this can prove more economically sound as such people can become employers and job creators rather than frustrated job seekers. Moreover, there are many short and medium-term courses with more benefits in the job market than attending university.

This option holds that we should reduce our dependence on universities and, as citizens, encourage our children/wards to explore other paths that might prove beneficial in both the short and long term.

But, the majority of our youth may end up lacking the larger awareness of the world that a university education can provide, and this could have serious implications for our country's scientific, technological and cultural advancement. We may also be outpaced by other countries who invest significantly in education.

Actions	Drawbacks
The private sector can deemphasize focus on university degrees and publicise roles/positions that require only short and medium-term training to fill.	Such jobs may only employ low-to-middle-skilled workers for stipends and thus restrict upward mobility.
Parents can encourage their children to explore various vocational options that are lucrative.	Some children who have the talent to flourish in academic fields may be prevented from attending university.
Communities and organisations can create media campaigns to promote skill-learning platforms and the opportunities they provide.	Fake platforms with nothing to offer might seize the opportunity to defraud youths and teach them nothing.
Government can strengthen primary and secondary education and encourage the growth of vocational schools.	This may encourage neglect and hasten the deterioration of our universities.
What else can be done to help youth choose more options?	What are some drawbacks to consider?

Option Three: Provide economic support.

An increase in tuition cost has been considered and already partially implemented in most universities. Many Nigerians struggle to afford these increased fees.

Student loans have been proposed, but their application is still unclear; and already, a large number of people have doubts and fears about the entire lending system. Increased hardship in the country has also indicated to citizens that the educational system cannot improve without a revitalisation of the economy.

This option holds that economic support should be provided to students in the form of loans, scholarships and part-time jobs. We should also redirect funds from departments where they are wasted to other places where they might be a relief to citizens.

But, loans may prove a burden in the long term, and not everyone may secure scholarships or part-time work.

Action	Drawback
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Provide accessible student loans to help low-income Nigerians acquire a university education.	These loans might prove to be a burden and unpayable in the long term.
Citizens should pressure their representatives to defund nonpriority government bodies and cut the huge welfare packages of executive and legislature officials, to channel the funds into needed areas.	While a step towards reducing economic inequality, these measures may not provide an adequate means of funding universities.
Groups and organisations can be incentivised to provide more scholarships for promising students.	Some students who could use support may not get the help they need.
Communities, nonprofits and student bodies could create social services to help connect students to jobs they can do to support their parents in paying their tuition.	These jobs might not be available for every student, and some might not earn enough to make a significant difference.
What else can be done to provide economic support for education?	What are some drawbacks to consider?

About This Issue Guide

Prepared by the Research and Development Team of the **Literary Renaissance Foundation (LRF)**, this issue advisory serves as a preliminary note for the roundtable discussion on 'Tackling the Problem of ASUU Strikes in the Nigerian University System'.

The LRF is a non-profits aligned with the Agenda 4 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals of taking strategic and deliberate action to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all.³

Ground Rules

- Focus on the options and actions we can take nationally and in our communities.
- Consider all options fairly.
- Listening is just as important as speaking.
- No one or two individuals should dominate.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.

³ United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#)