

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?

A REPORT

DATE: SATURDAY, 27 JANUARY 2024

TIME: 4:00 PM WAT

PREPARED BY THE LITERARY RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION (LRF)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

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.

The persistent strikes 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.

The Literary Renaissance Foundation (LRF) organized its First Quarter Reading Culture Dialogue focusing specifically on the issue of ASUU strikes and ways to tackle it. The Chairman of ASUU, University of Illorin Chapter, representatives from the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education; representatives from the, Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment; and other stakeholders from the educational sector were among those who gathered to discuss the problem and suggest solutions.

The prevailing question in the Dialogue was: **How can we improve our tertiary institutions and also see that strike is minimized if not completely eradicated?**

By organizing these discussions, the LRF aims to provide solutions to Nigerian university students, and bridge the gap between University students and ASUU.

FORMAT OF THE PROGRAMME

This is the first quarterly Dialogue for the year, 2024. The panel included the Chairman of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), University of Ilorin Chapter the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, represented by Dr. Emem. O. Etunkwa, a Deputy Director of Education, Information, and Documentation; Mrs. Mehlion Keturah Maigari, Assistant Director from the Federal Ministry of Education; and Mr. Hyacinth Egwaba of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Others present were; parents, teachers, lecturers, educational officials, a lawyer, a civil servant and other individuals with keen interest in the topic.

Programme date: Saturday, July 8, 2023

Programme venue: Zoom

Facilitators: Babatunde Oladele (facilitator), and Mary Ogundipe (timekeeper) **Participants:** Chukwuma Adekunle (Enugu), Linus Tagang Barry (Jos), Olasupo Olabisi (Ibadan), Olamide Omolawal (Ibadan), Williams Oladele (Ogun), Sola Lebile (Akure), Chioma Eneje (Maiduguri), Amos Akande (Abuja), Prisca Onyinye (Italy), Chinyere Nwokike (Ibadan), Chike, Adegboyega, and more.

The Dialogue began at 4 p.m. WAT and continued till 7 p.m. The participants took turns introducing themselves at the start, saying their names, location, and occupation, after which the moderator introduced himself and his colleagues and talked about the origin of the Dialogue and the LRF.

He also enlightened everyone on the purpose of the Dialogue, its goals, and how it would be conducted.

The discussion was inclusive; the moderator regularly invited participants to read various sections of the programme slides in accordance with the standard procedures set by the National Issues Forum (NIF) of the United States. Prior to initiating discussions, certain ground rules were established and mutually agreed upon by everyone:

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.

Discussion Structure

The discussion on the improvement of ASUU Strike and various options to tackle such consistent issue.

This topic was approached from three aspects:

- ❖ Option One: Emphasise More Responsible Leadership
- ❖ Option Two: Help Youth Choose More Options
- ❖ Option Three: Provide Economic Support

Each option described in the issue guide was discussed and various strategies to rectify the problem analyzed. For each action, a drawback was presented to understand possible barriers to implementation. Each person actively participated in the debate, contributing their ideas and carefully listening to others. Subsequent speakers frequently analyzed the ideas and contributions of the previous speakers, leading to very rich debates and insights.

The resulting details from each policy option are presented below.

Option One: Emphasise More Responsible Leadership

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

The following actions were considered:

- 1) Require universities to publicly publish annual financial and state-of-the-university reports.

- 2) Government should appoint only academics to ministerial and other critical positions related to education.
- 3) University senates should establish systems that ensure proper checks and balances in the financial management of their respective institutions.
- 4) Citizens should pressure their representatives to pass legislation banning any elected officials from sending their children/wards to universities abroad.

The possible obstacles to implementing these action points were identified with each drawback representing a barrier to the action described in the corresponding number.

- 1) This may lead to increased tensions between ASUU and the government and create a new form of problem in an already problematic situation.
- 2) Dishonest and corrupt academics may still end up being appointed to occupy such positions, while effective administrators are disenfranchised because they are non-academic.
- 3) Such systems may still be circumvented by powerful individuals and vested interests while maintaining an appearance of being functional.
- 4) Politicians and public officeholders might feel that this infringes on their right to send their children to university wherever they choose.

These points were discussed at length by the participants. Some emphasized the importance of implementing the actions. However, most speakers stressed that the increase of dishonesty and corruption is a foundational effect on the educational system.

Option Two: Help Youth Choose More Options

This option held that dependence on universities should be reduced and children/wards encouraged by citizens to explore other paths that might prove beneficial in both the short and long term.

The following actions were considered:

- 1) The private sector can deemphasize focus on university degrees and publicise roles/positions that require only short and medium-term training to fill.

- 2) Parents can encourage their children to explore various vocational options that are lucrative.
- 3) Communities and organizations can create media campaigns to promote skill-learning platforms and the opportunities they provide.
- 4) Government can strengthen primary and secondary education and encourage the growth of vocational schools.

The drawbacks to these propositions were also presented for discussion:

- 1) Such jobs may only employ low-to-middle-skilled workers for stipends and thus restrict upward mobility.
- 2) Some children who have the talent to flourish in academic fields may be prevented from attending university.
- 3) Fake platforms with nothing to offer might seize the opportunity to defraud youths and teach them nothing.
- 4) This may encourage neglect and hasten the deterioration of our universities.

Option Three: Provide Economic Support

This last option stated that economic support should be provided to students in the form of loans, scholarships and part-time jobs, and that funds should be redirected from departments where they are wasted to other places where they might provide some relief to citizens.

Below are the action points:

- 1) Provide accessible student loans to help low-income Nigerians acquire a university education.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Groups and organizations can be incentivized to provide more scholarships for promising students.

- 4) 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.

Their respective drawbacks include:

- 1) These loans might prove to be a burden and unpayable in the long term.
- 2) While a step towards reducing economic inequality, these measures may not provide an adequate means of funding universities.
- 3) Some students who could use support may not get the help they need.
- 4) These jobs might not be available for every student, and some might not earn enough to make a significant difference.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dialogue focused on the issue of ASSU Strike, its impacts, problems of industrial actions by lecturers in the Nigerian University system and suggested solutions. The listed options were widely deliberated upon by the participants. Each participant was given a chance to speak and contribute. Every contribution was noted. After each speaker had spoken, their views were summarized by the moderator to be certain that the points were well understood.

The Chairman of ASUU University of Illorin Chapter and representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education assured all participants that the points were duly noted and would be considered. The ground rules for the Dialogue were followed to the letter, ensuring that the deliberations were conducted in an organized and constructive manner.

The Dialogue was an overall success, as all participants actively participated in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and suggestions.

Recurring points among speakers include the following:

- ❖ Poor educational funding
- ❖ Vocational workers should be gainfully employed by both public and private sector.
- ❖ Creation of jobs outside Western knowledge and Possession of a skill outside one's course of study
- ❖ Government should consider the request of ASUU members

Recommendations

The following recommendation were discussed:

- 1) Leadership is critical to the educational sector. The desired change begins with the leaders.
- 2) The government should always make an effort to reach an agreement with ASUU.
- 3) Each university should have a report as to the published funding. There should be proper remuneration for teaching and non-teaching staff of the universities.
- 4) Parents should encourage their children to explore various vocational options that are lucrative.
- 5) Provide accessible student loans to help low-income Nigerians acquire a university education.

- 6) 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.

About LRF

The Literary Renaissance Foundation (LRF) is a non-profit organization that is aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 of undertaking strategic and deliberate actions to ensure an inclusive and equitable quality education for everyone as well as promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The organization was founded as a response to the increasing rate of illiteracy in Nigeria as well as an effort to curb the apathy to reading and learning among the citizens. The foundation was incorporated by the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria on March 23, 2018.