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Moses A. Adeniji

*Olabisi Onabanjo University, samad2ps@yahoo.com*

Olalekan A. Adekunjo

*Ambrose Alii University, blessingadekunjo@yahoo.com*

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## **The Role and Impact of Non-Academics Staff Union (NASU) in Two Nigerian Universities**

Moses A. Adeniji

College Librarian

College of Engineering & Technology

Olabisi Onabanjo University

Ogun State, Nigeria

Olalekan A. Adekunjo

Dept of Library & Information Science

Ambrose Alli University

Ekpoma, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Unionisation is one reaction of workers to employers' actions (Fajana 1995). Workers of different interests and needs come together in a trade union to negotiate the price of labour. The employers may see this as creating a monopoly. Individual workers lack power, however, and may not be able to seek improvement in wages and other working conditions. This is the logic of trade unionism (Fashoyin 1988). Trade unions are the main power resource of the work force. This power can promote the resolution of problems faced by the workers in an organisation. The union as a pressure group and its action or inaction may result in conflict with the employer. Conflict in the workplace cannot be ruled out, even with the existence of a trade union. The benefits of organised labour are often sought by those in non-union workplaces. Many of the wage increases in Nigeria and the allowances and bonuses are products of union activities. The union serves as a platform for social interaction among members by organising seminars, lectures, conferences, and symposia. The union members learn and develop educationally and also provide services like funerals for deceased members (Fashoyin 1981).

### **The Non-Academic Staff Union of Allied and Education Institutions**

The Non-Academic Union of Allied and Education Institutions (NASU) is the association that represents the junior non-teaching staff in Nigerian universities. The union came into existence in 1977 as one of the house unions, and in 1978 it was strengthened by decree No. 22 (Davison 1977). It was formally recognised as one of the 42 registered unions affiliated to Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). The principal objectives of the union are the regulation of relations between workers and the Governing Councils of the university. The Governing Councils and workers or their union work toward eliminating exploitation in the workplace, as well as providing benefits to members. In the history of NASU, the union has fought a number of battles that have contributed to the welfare of their members. Osang (2002) says that in December 1992, when Prof Babatunde Fafunwa was Education Minister, the federal government approved a separate University salary table that favoured members of the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), when NASU heard of the disparity in the salary table, they embarked on a 42-day nationwide strike to demonstrate their disapproval of the action of the federal government, favoured the academic staff over the non-teaching staff, who are a majority of the workforce. Osang

states further that in 1999, NASU presented a memorandum to the federal government to press home their demand for improved terms and conditions of services that will correct the problem created by the National Minimum Wages of General Abubakar on Elongated University Salary Scale (EUSS) in favour of the civil service salary table. The EUSS was restyled as the Harmonised Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure (HATISS).

When President Olusegun Obasanjo assumed the mantle of leadership in Nigeria, the minimum wage was negotiated with the trade unions under the umbrella of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). Individual workers are in a weak bargaining position with their employers when negotiating issue that affect them, but the union played dominant role of strengthening the position of workers in relation to employers. The unions at the university negotiate for the welfare of their members and serve as a platform for social interaction and education among members, by organising seminars, lectures, conference, and workshops. In addition, unions operate special loan plans to assist members in getting financial aid for emergency domestic needs. Moreover, NASU has also improved working conditions and raised the dignity of members through schemes such as the welfare system that the union operates by deducting a percentage from members' salaries. The scheme assists members after retirement before. Some unions operate cooperative shops where essential commodities are sold at regulated prices. Some operate thrifts and credit societies where members can obtain loans with minimal interest and a convenient means of repaying.

NASU serves a dual purpose. First, the union affords its members a feeling of job security, pursuing cases of unfair dismissal. Second, it provides a forum for members to satisfy psychological needs of belonging, leadership, esteem, etc. The union role in collective negotiation with management enables workers to participate in the management of their organisation. For an organisation to succeed, it must have a healthy working environment. Unions have helped maintain industrial peace, which is needed for achieving institutional goals and providing a strong workforce. Olugboye (1996) says that, while a trade union like NASU cannot be completely absolved of responsibility for strikes and work stoppages in Nigerian universities, the quiet searching of trade unions for dialogue with employers tends to be overlooked. Either management or the union must ensure that all work together as partners. In most institutions of higher learning, however, unions are frequently at loggerheads with management, the government, or themselves. This takes a toll on the universities, where large part of our nation's workforce is trained. Unions in Nigerian universities are one of the partners who must help ensure that the university achieves its purpose.

Fajana (1995) describes NASU as an organisation with some members in higher positions, while others occupy lower ranks. He states further that in Nigerian universities, both junior and senior staff associations exist, but a majority of the junior staff belong to NASU, while the senior staff belong to the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian University (SSANU). Apart from NASU and SSANU, there is also the Academic Staff Union of University (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. Both Olabisi Onabanjo University and the University of Ibadan have a chapter of NASU for non-teaching staff. NASU has played an important role in the educational development of Nigeria, and the history of education in Nigeria would not be complete without discussing the activities of this union. Osang (2002) says that between 1992 and 2000, NASU embarked on a considerable number of local and national strikes to compel management to meet their demands.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria is a developing nation that is grappling with fundamental national problems. Universities cannot be separated from the larger society where they operate. Universities in Nigeria operate with people performing certain specialised complementary roles to make the system to work. For example, there are lecturers imparting knowledge to students, librarians offering support to academicians, and administrators executing the policy of governing councils. There are also technologists, clerical staff, and

others. The workers identified above belong to one of several workers' associations (trade unions), except for the Vice Chancellor and other principal officers, who constitute the management of the institution.

Despite the apparently congenial industrial relations within the two university system, dissatisfaction and disharmony have often emerged and developed from unsatisfied demands or unchecked exhibitions of managerial prerogative amongst the three existing unions, resulting in conflict and eventually leading to the disruption of academic activities.

In view of these factors, the study seeks empirical information about the impact of trade unions on university education in Nigeria. This is with a view to highlighting the problems and strengthening the relationship between labour and management in order to ensure that there is an atmosphere conducive to improved productivity.

### Objectives of the Study

- To explore ways to strengthen the relationship between labour and management.
- To find out whether unionisation has affected the management of the university
- To determine to what extent strikes have affected productivity in the two schools
- To examine the extent to which educational policy formulation has been guided by the activities of university workers.

### Research Questions

1. Does the union play any role in the educational development of Nigeria?
2. Is the use of strikes to resolve problems in the universities effective?
3. Does the government play a role in the development of the education sector in Nigeria?
4. What strategies should the workers adopt to put the university at its best?

### Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. According to Best (1981), as cited by Adeniji (2006), descriptive survey is meant to examine the situation as it currently obtainable, and no variable was manipulated, in contrast to experimental design.

### Procedure

The instrument was administered during the first semester of 2007/2008 session. The administration was done by the researcher with the assistance of the union executive members for each school. Out of 200 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 150 were returned. This represents a return rate of 75 percent. The completed questionnaires were analysed using frequency count and percentages.

### Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Gender distribution

| Gender | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| Male   | 96        | 64      |
| Female | 54        | 36      |
| Total  | 150       | 1 00    |

More than three-fifths of respondents were male, and the rest female.

**Research Question 1: Does the union play any role in the educational development of Nigeria?**

Table 2: Role of union in university education.

| Respondent view                        | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Union plays significant role           | 120       | 80         |
| Union does not play a significant role | 30        | 20         |
| Total                                  | 150       | 100        |

About 80 percent of respondents saw the union playing a significant role in the educational development of Nigeria.

**Research Question 2: Does the use of strike as a weapon resolve problems in the universities?**

Table 3: Solving crisis through strike.

| Respondents view                        | Frequency | Percentages |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| Strike can be used to resolve to crisis | 90        | 60          |
| Strike cannot be used to resolve crisis | 60        | 40          |
| Total                                   | 150       | 100         |

Sixty percent of respondents agreed strikes can be used to resolve a labour crisis in the university. Osang (2002) states that between 1992 and 2000 NASU, embarked on a considerable number of local and national strikes to compel management to meet their demands.

**Research Question 3: Does the government play any role in the educational development of Nigeria?**

Table 4: Role of government in the educational development of Nigeria.

| Respondents view | Frequency | Percentages |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes              | 135       | 90          |
| No               | 15        | 10          |
| Total            | 150       | 100         |

An overwhelming majority agree that the government plays a role in the educational development of Nigeria. This agrees with what Gidado (2003), and Elaturoti (2006), found in their research. Government's role includes funding at various levels from primary to tertiary institutions.

**Research Question 4 what are the strategies the workers adopt to put the university at its best?**

Table 5: Strategies adopted by workers to put the university at its best.

| Strategies adopted | Frequency | Percentages |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|

|                       |     |     |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|
| The use of dialogue   | 90  | 60  |
| Collective bargaining | 60  | 40  |
| Total                 | 150 | 100 |

Sixty percent of respondents see workers using dialogue as a method of putting the university at its best, while forty percent view collective bargaining as a strategy that will accomplish this.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Members of NASU in the two universities studied observe a strong role for unions in creating a work environment that is harmonious, peaceful, and productive. They see strikes as an effective weapon, but also favour dialogue. Government as the prime mover plays a key role in ensuring the success of the education sector by setting the rules that guide its establishment and funding institutions of higher learning. Trade unions have adopted dialogue and collective bargaining to address the welfare of their members. There is a need for both union and management to work for peaceful co-existence if any meaningful progress is to take place. Workers should make their best effort to ensure that they contribute to the development of the school. The Nigerian government and the designated parastatals should sensitize and mobilize stakeholders for effective funding of higher institutions in Nigeria.

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