

The Causes and Effects of Industrial Disputes by the Academic Staff Union of Colleges of Education: A Case Study of Federal College of Education, Zaria.

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Abstract— Education plays a crucial role in driving the process of sustainable national development. This originates from the central position it occupies in nation building but unfortunately, industrial disputes have remained pervasive in the nation's tertiary education sub – sector. This work is premised on determining the causes and effects of industrial disputes by the Academic Staff Union of Colleges of Education (COEASU) with special reference to the Federal College of Education, Zaria (FCEZ) from 1999 – 2014. It puts firmly that, the recent industrial dispute between the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) relates to class dispute which is aimed at protecting the interest of the present and future working force of the Colleges of Education (CoEs) and sister institutions against any form of exploitative tendencies from the Federal Government. The study adopted the experimental survey research and it studied a population of staff and students of the Federal College of Education, Zaria (FCEZ) wherein a sample size of 268 was drawn from the population accordingly using probability sampling. A total of two hundred and sixty – eight (268) questionnaires were administered to the sampled respondents by means of the simple random sampling (SRS) technique while the data was analysed utilizing the Chi – square inferential statistical test. The research findings revealed that while the frequency of dispute(s) in the college system still remains low till date, the causes of dispute were not limited to the non – payment of workers' entitlements, lack of conducive working environment, but more importantly government's penchant renege for agreements. Also, the effects include loss of man – hour, poor academic performance amongst others. However, it recommends that COEASU should explore effectively the principles of collective bargaining through dialogue; periodic needs assessment so as to address infrastructural deficiencies in the Colleges; and the government should at all times respect and fulfil agreements reached with the union so as to boost productivity in the system through effective industrial relations.

Keywords— Industrial dispute, industrial relations, College, collective bargaining

I. INTRODUCTION

Education as a central tool for socio – economic shift in any social set up has been described as a method of acculturating the vernal members of a circle to be au fait with the principles and ideals of and turn into competent members

who may perhaps give significant contributions to the progress of their host community [17].

Whereas it may possibly be supposed that no substantive progress can occur in a crisis – ridden system which is currently evident in the nation's educational institutions [13], the modern – day world is progressively multicultural and the identity crisis ensuing from this tend to undermine sustainable human development in certain situations. This has made the furtherance of understanding and dialogue crucial to the discourse in the management of multiculturalism, global peace and security [24].

Conflict is an inevitable friction in every establishment. Efficient and effective management of conflicts is central to the progress of any social set up, but the rife state of affairs in the country represent a setback of this reality. Conflict in higher education is ineludible. It has permeated every stratum of our academic world. It could serve as a medium for transforming both individuals and institutions to a novel altitude of effectuality despite its inherent devastating consequences on the fabric of the institution most especially when allowed to linger on indefinitely. What seems to be most striking here is conflict management [14].

Overtime Nigeria has experienced a cornucopia of industrial unrest at the expense of harmonious industrial coexistence in its workforce. The pattern of industrial relations has been uncordial with far – reaching outcomes ranging from man hour losses to psychogenic disorders on the citizens who are denied access to public services due to industrial actions. This is attributable to the inability of management or government to respond promptly to issues of discontent through dialogue with labour union executives and uninformed policy options. More importantly is the lack of political will to respect and implement agreements reached with the unions by the government [5]. Likewise, [21] opined that the predisposition of government to breaching agreements was unacceptable. As a result, it is not surprising to see the Colleges of Education (CoEs) engaged in disputes.

The Colleges of Education System is the third tier of the tertiary education sub – sector in Nigeria charged with the

principal function of training teachers for the award of the Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE).

In the recent past, the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) (which is the umbrella body of the Academic Staff of Nigerian Colleges) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) were engaged in industrial conflict over several issues of importance to the union, including poor wages and service conditions of academic staff members in government owned colleges across the country, the problem of underfunding and infrastructural neglect (with far reaching consequences such as, strikes, lock – out, boycotts, picketing) which tend to undermine the quality of teaching, research, scholarship and innovation.

The sad event which took place after a week warning strike and a 60 – day ultimatum issued to the government by the union on the 16th and 26th of September, 2013 respectively resulted in the total closure of our colleges nationwide and paralysis of academic activities for over eight (8) months.

The then President of the Union, Mr. Asagha Okoro, said: “we have packaged all the issues facing the teaching education sector. If we do not see concrete action within 60 days, we will employ non – conventional industrial methods to make our voice heard. What we are asking for is not much; most of these demands can be met with as little as N26bn” [1].

He further stated that, the union had pointed out 17 issues to be addressed by the government. They include: “the suspicious delay in the release of the 2012 visitation white paper; the refusal of colleges managements to recruit commensurate academic manpower to cater for the high dearth of academic staff to meet the contemporary challenges engendered by the rising population of students; the non – harmonization of conditions of service for academic staff of all tertiary institutions to stem brain drain from the colleges of education to the universities; the proposed selective imposition of Integrated Personnel Payroll and Information System (IPPIS) in the CoEs and the polytechnics; the truncation of a hitherto functional and innovative Tertiary Education Trust Fund leading to obvious regrettable gaps that compromises the critical need for the consolidation of the gains recorded during the past five years; non – implementation of CONPCASS, 65years retirement age and Migration to CONTISS 15 in some state CoEs; the non – conduct of Needs Assessment for CoEs to address students and staff needs for the enhancement of quality teaching and learning” [1].

Other issues of contention are: “the refusal of government to approve an independent degree awarding status for all CoEs certified by the National Universities Commission (NUC) as being qualified to award degrees in Teacher Education; illegal imposition of Group Life Insurance underwriters and the non – payment of death benefits to our deceased colleague’s families between 2000 and 2013; non –

budgetary allocations for outsourced services and the refusal of government to heed the call for the abrogation of outsourced services and the offer of regular employment to all those in the outsourced cadre and the payment of outstanding arrears to the tune of N2,443,278,543.96; the non – allocation or release of funds (N2,344,765,841) for crucial academic activities like accreditation programmes, among others” [1].

For instance, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has recommended that at least 26% of the nation’s budget should be allocated to education, so as to boost the human capital requirements of the country. But the current realities on ground in the nation’s educational sector especially those of the tertiary sector constitute a volte – face.

According to [27] recession that characterised the global economy in 1980s give rise to socio – economic issues in the Nigerian educational system. Also the crisis that lasted between 1979 and 1999 resulted in significant job stoppages. Issues of unpaid salaries to teachers, infrastructural decay and the pervasiveness of industrial actions have featured prominently across all strata of the nation’s educational sector to the extent that the budgetary provision for (allocation to) the sector had since declined significantly below the UNESCO threshold.

In addition, the extent of this crisis can be better appreciated when considered from the perspective of its wider implications on the society. This is because it truncates the academic calendar and by extension the teaching – learning process of colleges which is devastating for the nation’s educational sector. As a result, students who are the most vulnerable are left at the mercy of their fate. In some instances, these students become social menace to the society as they are seen to engage in all forms of social vices such as theft, drug abuse, political thuggery, prostitution etc. merely to relieve their depression. Parents or guardians, on the other hand, are not spared of the consequences of the struggle as it places undue pressure on household economies in terms of psychological stress and resource wastages.

Nwaocha [20], notwithstanding, stressed the need for a proactive as well as a comprehensive and up to date policy on industrial relations while tracing the ugly trend to the absence of a well functional conflict resolution mechanism which is in line with the prevalent economic realities of the state.

Hence, this study is premised on identifying the causes and effects of industrial disputes in the Nigerian Colleges of Education with special reference to the Federal College of Education, Zaria (FCEZ).

1.1 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the research:

Ho₁: Non – payment of workers’ entitlements does not give rise to industrial dispute.

Ho₂: Unconducive working environment does not give rise to industrial dispute.

Ho₃: Industrial dispute does not result in man – hour loss.

Ho₄: Industrial dispute does not result in students’ poor academic performance.

Ho₅: Government renegue does not give rise to industrial disputes.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

There are multifaceted theories of industrial relations as a result of its multi – disciplinary nature; hence a generally acceptable definition for industrial relation is difficult to come by if not impossible [8]. This is simply because it has had several applications overtime [22].

This research adopts the Marxism approach to industrial relations. This is because industrial disputes in Nigeria can be best explained using this approach. Marxist theory views industrial conflict as rooted in the economic structures of capitalist societies. It is a theory of social change, and although there are a number of schools of Marxism scholarship, Marxism is essentially a method of analysing power relationships in society [12].

In the bourgeois capitalist state, the competing class interests are those of profit – seeking capitalists and the wage – earning proletariat. The struggle for economic hegemony between them is deemed to be inevitable, irrevocable and irreconcilable. Industrial conflict between employer and employee, and between management and union, is merely a reflection of the dominant class interests within capitalism and is synonymous with class conflict. As such employee relations conflict, between those buying labour in the marketplace and those selling it, is seen as a permanent feature of capitalism [15].

In Marxist analysis, the trade union serve to maintain and defend the class interests of working people using every available medium within its reach [12].

Industrial Relations:

The term ‘Industrial Relations’ consists of two terms: ‘Industry’ and ‘Relations’. “Industry” refers to “any productive activity in which an individual (or a group of individuals) is (are) engaged”. By “relations” we mean “the relationships that exist within the industry between the employer and his workmen” [10].

Employment relations is the study of the regulation of the employment relationship between employer and employee, both as individual and collective units as well as

coming to terms with substantive and procedural issues at industrial, organizational and workplace levels [28].

Damachi [9] gave a functional approach to industrial relations in the context of Nigeria. He defined it in the production process by pointing out that the crucial elements of the Nigeria system of industrial relations include the environment, which influences the actors as well as their goals, ideology and power.

He further argued that the environment influences the actors, especially in the process of making rules, both procedural and substantive and on the whole gamut of industrial relations practices. Thus, it’s based on the principles of collective bargaining inherited from the British Colonial System [19].

Where such interaction between the employer and the employee organization (union) are limited to the two (bi – partite) without the intervention of the state such process is regarded as labour relations, employee or management relation; while if the trade dispute which arises from the interaction between the two groups leads to state intervention in a process involving tri – partite interaction, then such is within the ambit of industrial relations. Such state intervention towards settlement may take the form of voluntary or compulsory reconciliation, or mediation, or commission of inquiry, or voluntary or compulsory arbitration [4].

Industrial Dispute:

According to [29], an industrial dispute may be defined as a disagreement between management and workers on the terms of employment. It is a dissension between an employer and employees’ representative; usually a labour union, over pay and other working conditions which could result in industrial actions. Also, both parties (the management and workmen) mount pressure on one another in the event of an industrial dispute. While the workers may embark on strikes, the management on its own part may resort to lockouts.

Onyeonoru [25] gave a more comprehensive definition of industrial conflict as all expressions of discontentment within the employment relationship especially those pertaining to the employment contract and effort bargain. He expatiated further that it includes formal expressions of conflict, organized along the lines of trade unions and employers’ associations as well as the informal conflict that lack systematic organizations such as concealed scores that may be expressed in the form of industrial sabotage, absenteeism, or lateness.

On the other hand, [7] argued that the term industrial action refers to a situation where the employers’ or the employees’ side take joint action to mount pressure on the other collective bargaining party in order to achieve its goals. Industrial actions manifest in the form of strikes by employees, lock – outs by employers, and boycotts. Industrial action can be measured in three dimensions: the number of

strikes and lock – outs (frequency of industrial action); the number of workers affected (extent of industrial action); and the number of working days lost (volume of industrial action).

2.2 Empirical Review

Causes of Industrial Disputes:

Ige, Adeyeye and Aina [16] in an empirical study of the factors influencing industrial conflicts in Nigeria (1980 – 2010) using the Simultaneous Equation Model Techniques (SEMT) in which strikes and wage rates were made endogenous revealed that changes in wage rate, price expectation and union membership concentration influence industrial conflicts in Nigeria.

Akume and Abdullahi [5] observed that significant among the reasons that have vexed the situation is the unprecedented jumbo salaries and allowances being paid to political offices holders. The other factor is not unconnected with government persistent character of reneging from implementing signed agreement with its labour union.

Otobo [26] has identified two main sources or causes of industrial conflicts in organizations namely, internal and external. According to him, the internal sources of conflict include, style of management, nature of physical environment of the workplace, orientation or social consciousness of workers, others are conditions of service, efficacy or otherwise of the promotion system, cumbersomeness of grievance and disputes procedure. The external sources include government industrial and economic policies, the nature of labour legislation, unpatriotic and unethical conduct of the elite groups, national economic mismanagement and general distribution of wealth and power in the society.

Ajewole [3] noted that, the primary causes of labour unrest in Nigeria include perceived low income, lack of conducive working conditions, hike of fuel price, National Minimum Wage by the Federal Government, industrial and economic policies, reinstatement of the sacked lecturers, Federal Government/Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) 1999 signed agreement, payment of entitlements.

Ndum and Stella [18] stressed that the causes of conflict in the university system include fierce competition for scarce resources, perceived goal incompatibility, the need for autonomy and academic freedom, management style of universities, difference in values and lifestyles, politics and national issues amongst others.

Ekundayo [11] argued that the causes of conflicts between the trade unions and university managements include inadequate funding of the system, unhealthy condition of service, and unspeakable leadership style of university administrators.

Adegoroye and Ayinde [2] revealed that the primary causes of industrial disputes include poor conditions of service, acts of disregard for agreement by government,

wrongful retirement and retrenchment of teachers and inadequate remuneration.

Effects of Industrial Disputes:

Arputharaj and Gayatri [6] opined that the consequences of industrial disputes are many, but gave a brief general description of these as disturbance of economic, social and political life of a country, loss of output, decline in the demand for goods and services, lasting loss to the workers, increase in indebtedness, problem to consumers, loss to the management or employer, bad effect on labour relations and obstruction to economic growth.

Ajewole [3] argued that labour unrest has negative effects in achieving the goals of university education in Nigeria, namely, disruption of academic calendar, financial losses, economic retardation, drop out, brain drain and educational wastage.

Ojo [23] while discussing the implications of ASUU, Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) strike identified the lack of trust and confidence of the scholars in the government as the source of disputes which leads to delayed graduation, disposition to social vice, premature death of students involved in accidents and low academic performance.

It is obvious from the reviews that, there seems to be little or no empirical literature on industrial disputes in the Colleges of Education (COEs). Thence, the need to address this literature gap.

III. METHODOLOGY

Industrial dispute is a phenomenon that has always disrupted the teaching – learning process in most tertiary institutions and calls for greater concern by stakeholders.

The research design espoused by this study is survey design. In this process, a closed and open-ended type of questionnaire was formulated so as to generate data from respondents. The staff (academic and non – academic) and students of the Federal College of Education, Zaria (FCEZ) constituted the population of study for the research.

A total number of two hundred and six – eight (268) questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents, but only two hundred and forty – nine (249) representing 92.9% were retrieved and considered while nineteen (19) representing 7.1% were not via random sampling technique.

The data collected were presented and analysed quantitatively using the inferential statistical method wherein the Chi – Square One Way Test (Goodness – of – Fit) was adopted in the process.

3.1 Instrumentation

The instrument developed for the study was a questionnaire designed to tap information on the causes and effects of industrial disputes in Nigerian Colleges of

Education with the Federal College of Education, Zaria (FCEZ) as the case study. The questionnaire was designed to be administered to both staff and students of the College.

The questionnaire consists of four (4) sections with a total of thirty – two (32) items. Five (5) of the items from section A were designed to elicit information on the socio – demographics characteristics of the respondents; three (3) of the items from section B were designed to get information on the frequency of industrial disputes in the Colleges; twenty (20) items from section C were of the Likert – type with a five (5) point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) on one end of the continuum, to Undecided (UD) on the other, designed to obtain information on the causes and effects of industrial disputes; and the remaining four (4) items from section D were of the open – ended type, designed to tap information on the way forward to industrial disputes.

In addition, the instrument adopted for this research was found to be valid and reliable following readjustments to items and the conduct of a pilot test by the researcher on independent samples of the population under study. This ensured that the instrument was relevant at high level of precision.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 4.1: Non – Payment of Workers’ Entitlements Does Not Give Rise to Industrial Dispute

Non – payment of workers’ entitlements		
Chi – Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
156.361 ^a	4	.000

$X^2 (4) = 156.36, p < .05$

The analysis from the table above showed that the null hypothesis was rejected, $X^2 (4) = 156.36, p < .05$ and the alternative hypothesis that non – payment of workers’ entitlements gives rise to industrial dispute was accepted. This implies that industrial dispute is very much likely to ensue from non – payment of workers’ entitlements.

Table 4.2: Unconducive Working Environment Does Not Give Rise to Industrial Dispute

Unconducive working environment		
Chi – Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
129.855 ^a	4	.000

$X^2 (4) = 129.86, p < .05$

The result from the above table shows that unconducive working environment gives rise to industrial dispute ($X^2 (4) = 129.86, p < .05$). Thus, provision of conducive working environment forestalls industrial dispute.

Table 4.3: Industrial Dispute Does Not Result in Man – Hour Loss

Man hour loss		
Chi – Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
80.779 ^a	4	.000

$X^2 (4) = 80.779^a, p < .05$

The result from the analysis indicates that the calculated Chi – square value of 80.779 for 4 degrees of freedom was less than the usual threshold value of 0.05 (in fact 0.001). Hence, suggesting that industrial dispute results in man-hour loss with wider implications on workers’ efficiency as well.

Table 4.4: Industrial Dispute Does Not Result in Students’ Poor Academic Performance.

Students’ poor academic performance		
Chi – Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
101.984 ^a	4	.000

$X^2 (4) = 101.98, p < .05$

The report from the output above which supports the rejection of the null hypothesis, $X^2 (4) = 101.98, p < .05$ depicts a very strong evidence of industrial dispute resulting in students’ poor academic performance. This is supported by the rejection of null hypothesis, $X^2 (4) = 101.98, p < .05$.

Table 4.5: Government Renegue Does Not Give Rise to Industrial Disputes.

Government renegue		
Chi – Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
259.414 ^a	4	.000

$X^2 (4) = 259.41, p < .05$

The result from the table above favoured the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis suggesting that government renegue gives rise to industrial dispute ($X^2 (4) = 259.41, p < .05$). Thusly, government’s commitment to fulfilling its promises is key to ensuring industrial harmonious relations in the system.

4.1 Findings

The following were discovered from the foregoing analyses based on the decision rule of Chi – Square which is: Reject H_0 if p – value < 0.05 .

- There is very strong evidence of a link between workers’ entitlement and industrial dispute.
- There is very strong evidence of a link between unconducive working environment and industrial dispute.
- There is very strong evidence of a link between man – hour loss and industrial dispute.

- There is very strong evidence of a link between poor academic performance and industrial dispute.
- There is very strong evidence of a link between government's fulfilment of its obligation and industrial dispute.

V. CONCLUSION

Industrial disputes have remained pervasive in the history of the country's labour relations especially in the tertiary education sector which the Colleges of Education (CoEs) are now part of in recent times.

The findings from the study posit that the frequency of disputes is still very low in the college system relative to other sister tertiary institutions in the country even till date. This was attributable to the marginal attention it received from both management and government before now.

In addition, the causes and effects of industrial disputes in colleges have been found to be multifaceted with far reaching socio – economic consequences on the overall well – being of the country. This points out to the need for improved wages and salaries, conditions of service, improved funding, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, conducive working environment, government's political will and so on.

On the other hand, the prospects of quality education in the country include adequate number of trained and qualified teachers or lecturers, curriculum innovation, improved instructional methods and materials, adequate infrastructural facilities, staff training and development, utilization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching – learning process, sound educational policies, brain gain, just to mention a few.

However, the fact remains that until the twin challenges of corruption and bad governance are tackled head on; and in so far as the government considers dispute in the sub – sector as a short – term measure to the sky – rocketing rates of unemployment, there will be much still left to be desired.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Stakeholders in the sector should explore to the fullest the tools of collective bargaining through dialogue as it still remains the most viable tool in this regard.
- 2) The union should institute a legal case against the government beforehand. This will allow for the signing of an agreement by both parties which is backed up by a competent court of jurisdiction.
- 3) The government ought to put in place anticipatory industrial relations policy to reflect the welfare dynamics of workers. This stresses the need for a periodic review of workers' conditions of service,

say every five (5) or eight (8) years as proposed by the National Conference (CONFAB) in the case of the National Minimum Wage and as well establish a professional arm made up of experts from the civil service or ministry of labour who will be empowered to interface with the leaders of the union on continuous basis.

- 4) There should be timely and rigorous implementation of periodic NEEDS assessment reports so as to address the infrastructural deficiencies in the colleges.
- 5) Government at all levels should remain committed to achieving this feat, quality education. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s blue – print on education is a very good policy in this regard, as it allows for the allocation of at least 26% of the nation's budget to the education sector as against the 9% currently committed to it. To this end, it is strongly advocated that the budgetary allocation to the sector rise to at least 45% annually above the UNESCO's recommendation.
- 6) Both parties should exhibit a great deal of flexibility and unbiasedness in the negotiation process by considering a common ground in agitating for qualitative education in the country which is a two – way street; hence the need for give and take so as to foster industrial peace in the system.
- 7) Government should at all times honour and respect agreements reached and signed with the union by fulfilling its obligations through speedy implementation. This has been identified as the potential source of dispute. A case in time was the recent industrial action (strike) embarked upon by the academic staff of Nigerian Colleges under the aegis of the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) in December, 2013 over the non – implementation of its 2010 agreement and other demands. This will go a long way in building trust and promoting effective industrial relations in the system.
- 8) Transparency and accountability should be entrenched into the system as well as zero tolerance for corruption; and the institution of good governance by the government. This will ensure that government promises are backed by real commitment.
- 9) The interest of students who are often the most vulnerable groups in times of disputes should be protected by narrowing the duration of disputes and readjusting the battered academic calendar to adequately reflect their learning outcomes in order not to result in poor academic performance.

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