

Implications of Industrial Unrest of Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria

Patrick N. NWAJIOHA (Ph.D)¹

Beatrice A. ACHILIKE²
(Associate Professor)²

Sarah O. EGWU (Ph.D)³

Francisca N. EDE (Ph.D)⁴

Lydia O. AGWU (Ph.D)⁵

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.*

Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the implications of industrial unrest of academic staff union of universities in Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey research design was used. The population comprised all Dean of Faculties, Head of Departments, Heads of different Units and lecturers of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. A stratified random sampling technique was used, while the sample size was two hundred (200) respondents; comprising of seven Faculty Deans, twenty H.O.Ds and one hundred and seventy three lecturers drawn from various faculties of the University. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was made up of 18 items, with six in each of the three clusters addressing the respective research question. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity using three experts, while a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Estimate. The instrument was administered personally by the researchers while data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.50 constitute a benchmark for affirmative response. The findings reveal among others that incessant ASUU strike constitutes threats to literacy campaign in Nigeria as it distorts academic calendar and breeds haphazard implementation of curriculum contents amongst other negative educational implications. Consequently, it was recommended among others that the government should make policies that are dynamic and long lasting. Thus, policies on education should not be left for every government to change; rather every government should build on the policies that have been set before. The minister and commissioners of education should not be chosen unilaterally, but should be appointed from a group of senior career educationist to achieve excellence and promote academic standards in all ramifications.

Keywords: Industrial unrest, Academic Staff Union, Education, Economic and Security Implications,

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, universities have played dominant roles in the development of the whole world and Nigeria in particular. Universities are usually in the forefront in combating socio-political cum economic challenges; especially with the power of research being focused on areas that will promote human development and solving existential societal problems (Admad and Basheer, 2012). Universities no doubt, have the broad vision of serving as pace-setting institutions in terms of learning, character building and service to mankind with a mission to producing competent and resourceful graduates of high intellectual standards and societal development through appropriate teaching, research and other services to humanity. The university is the brain box of the nation as it provides higher education that restores to mankind its sanity and increase adaptability.

Interestingly, education is a social good and not just a commodity for sale. The provision of education is therefore one of the social responsibility of any government to her citizens. Nwajioha (2016) posited that education be it formal or informal constitute the engine of growth, development and transformation of any society. Thus, education is considered a necessity for the survival of man, it suggests development of valuable knowledge and skills in a society, it brings about in the persons submitted to it, certain skills and attitudes that are adjudged useful and desirable not only to the recipient, but also to the society. It is however disheartening and really ironical that education, the process that involves all round development of cognitive, psychomotor and affective ability of individuals towards the advancement of the society, is mostly relegated to the background in Nigeria (Akuh, 2016).

There is no doubt whatsoever that, for the university system to function as efficiently and effectively as expected, the stakeholders need to work harmoniously, in collaboration with the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) and other labour unions of universities; with a clear sense of focus in line with the vision and mission of establishing ivory tower in

the world and Nigeria in particular. It is the vision and mission that guide the university in its development processes as well as its services to the society. In the same vein, the society needs to be in good condition and under the control of leaders who understand the worth of education for the desired objectives to be realized. But this is not the concern of the stakeholders in Nigeria. Therefore, ASUU as a trade union, in order to fight for their rights, good working conditions in the universities and better living standards for the masses in society have been engaging in incessant strike actions so as to press home her demands (Aidelunughene, 2014; Araga, 2014; Akuh, 2016).

The action and counteraction of the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) in recent years, to the recalcitrant attitude of the federal government towards the past agreement; conditions of service, salaries and allowances, adequate funding of education as prescribed by UNESCO, University autonomy, just to mention but a few had led to frequent industrial action by ASUU. Pertinently, ASUU has always resulted to employment of strike as the last resort to balance the power between members and the government when other bargaining approaches and consultations failed to yield desirable result. This according Ibrahim (2015) imply that the only language that is partially understandable by successive administrations in Nigeria is strike action.

It is unfortunate however that the cacophony between the government and the ASUU is frequently dragged to the point of jeopardizing the success of our education system in Nigeria with its negative implications on the academic achievement of the students and its multiplier effect on the society. Suffice it to say that staff industrial action in Nigeria Universities has become a common phenomenon with its detrimental effects on the academic commitment and success of Nigeria students (Nwajioha, 2016). But, it should be noted that the counteraction of ASUU to actions and inaction of the government is not self centered as often alleged by less informed public; but incited by the quest to resuscitate the acclaimed fall in Nigeria educational standard. It is therefore incontrovertible that the incessant agitations of ASUU is aimed at fostering the adequate conditions of service which would go a long way in stimulating advantageous atmosphere for students to accomplish the prerequisite curriculum objectives. This study holds the view that the request of ASUU if properly addressed, would reduce to the barest minimum if not to zero level the half-baked graduates or unlearned illiterates that Nigeria tertiary institutions are turning out lately.

No doubt, the epileptic economy of Nigeria is also not immune of the cancerous implications of the incessant industrial disharmony between ASUU and her employer (government) in Nigeria. Amadi and Precious (2015) stated that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has since the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo and the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari through the successive military regimes (Buhari, Babangida, Abacha and Abdulsalami) up to the present day forth republic in Nigeria, taken up the duty of intellectuals throughout the world, to promote the development of education in Nigeria. This duty requires the creation of first-rate higher educational

institutions, especially universities; a well-funded system with advanced and adequate teaching and research facilities, and internationally competitive remuneration to keep Nigerian academics in their country and attract students from all over the world to boost Nigerian economy. Regrettably, the reverse is the case as public universities in Nigeria are mostly characterized by infrastructural decay and poor condition of service which often force lecturers out of the classroom as the only language that attracts government attention (Nwajioha, 2016). Aside the bad reputation the strikes conferred on Nigeria education system; the unnecessary delayed and extension of duration of students in school in the face of age sensitivity or discriminating Nigeria labour market, which plummet the economic value of the graduates in the professional engagements also constitute sources of worries to Nigerians.

Similarly, the increasing cases of threats to life and property, kidnapping, prostitution and other forms of criminality, mostly amongst youths in Nigeria are unarguably not unconnected to the often prolonged ASUU strike that makes students highly vulnerable to all manner of criminalities. Agbakwuru (2017) rightly observed that gullible students, who are often pushed out of campuses while the strike lasted, easily get admitted by hoodlums to wreck havoc in the society; thereby given credence to the popular saying that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. It is on the bases of the above that this study attempted to investigated the implications of industrial disharmony between the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) and the government of Nigeria; with the aim of showcasing to all stakeholders the dangers associated to the prolonged strike actions and the need to evolve other workable approaches to industrial bargaining.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

University is a citadel of knowledge for learning and quality research, where the future giant are build. Regrettably, the present situation of public universities in Nigeria is pitiable and constitutes a source of concern to all education loving stakeholders; including students, lecturers, parents and researchers to mention but a few. The university system in Nigeria is so much politicized that the much talked about university autonomy has turned a subject of caricature; just like the infrastructural facilities in most public universities are in a sorry state. Needless to emphasize that most public universities in Nigeria today suffer from poor infrastructural facilities, school plants, social amenities, brain drain and motivated staff which obviously reflect in poor teaching and learning, substandard research output and low quality graduates; who are mostly ill-equipped for the labour market and increasing global competitiveness. These problems in the nation's ivory tower are impediments to the realization of the goals for which universities in Nigeria are established.

It is therefore the opinion of the researchers in this study that the reoccurring nature of industrial unrest which ASUU uses as a tool to correct these obvious anomalies in public universities impinges on the ethos of academic excellence thereby making the Nigerian public universities objects of

caricature. A situation where students of public universities are frequently kept away from schools for a long time while lecturers are unnecessarily denied of their salaries and entitlements makes them easy prey and vulnerable to criminalities. The frustration of parents and most especially students who wait endlessly for graduation with reference to their age vis-à-vis the discriminating labour market in Nigeria are better imagined than experienced.

It is on the basis of the above scenarios that this present study sets out to explore the implications of the incessant industrial unrest of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria; with a view to recommending more practicable approaches toward saving our fast deteriorating educational system and other related sectors of the Nigerian economy from the impending danger of total collapse.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the educational implications of ASUU strike in Nigeria?
2. Of what implication is the ASUU strike to the economy of Nigeria?
3. What is the implication of ASUU strike to security in Nigeria?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Industrial Unrest

It is pertinent to first and foremost highlight vividly, the meaning of industrial relations before conceptualizing industrial unrest; this is because industrial unrest in itself is an attribute of industrial relations. Thus, Araga (2014) opined that industrial relation is the pattern of interactions that exist between trade unions (employees) and employers. It includes all the issues affecting human resources as well as the effort of the government in such human resources management (Ezeagba, 2014). Thus, one can rightly say that industrial unrest occurs whenever these relationships go sore. Industrial unrest therefore implies any form of action by employees which is aimed at forcing the employers to come to terms with the demands of the labour unions (employees). Hence, industrial unrests result from a conflicting interest between employers and employees in respect to working conditions, wages demands, management policies, etc (Admad and Basheer, 2012).

Similarly, Given and Grace (2014) stated that industrial unrest involves any action which affects, or is likely to affect the terms or condition, whether expressed or implied, of a context and which is taken by any member or body of workers (labour union), as a means of compelling their employer to accept or not to accept terms or conditions of employment as clearly specified. To Akuh (2016), industrial unrest connotes disputes between employees and employers on any ground, which mostly result to strikes, lockouts, etc that affects both parties on either the short or long run. Industrial unrest is a

characteristic attribute of collective bargaining in particular and industrial relations in general. It is the weapon of power in the hands of employees against employers which is utilized whenever situation demands.

On the other hand, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) stated that strike is an element of industrial unrest which implies an effort by employee to withhold work so that the employer will make greater concessions at the bargaining table. They argued that strike is the major bargaining weapon used by the labour union. Accordingly, it is varied from total strike where the employees stop work until the demand for better condition of employment is met, to sit-down strike where employee strike but remain at work place. Michael (2004) asserted that strikes are most politically charged of all the features of industrial relation. Strikes are too often a weapon of first rather than last resort. However, labour unions have recognized that a strike is a legitimate last resort if all else fails. It is simply, a temporary stoppage of work aimed at forcing the employers to accept employees' demand.

The legality of the strike action often requires approval by the majority of employees probably by balloting or independent verification to ascertain the majority support. It requires also that the notice of impending strike must be given to employer in advance just as the employer must usually be provided with the result of the ballot and issued with the final notice to embark on the strike. Strike is the most visible and controversial form of collective action in the event of a labour dispute and is often seen as the last resort of labour unions in pursuit of their demands (Aluede, Idogho and Imonikhe, 2012).

Labour Union

According to Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011), labour union is an organization of employees that uses collective action to advance its members' interest with regards to wages and working conditions. It is formed because of the belief that there is strength in unity. It may refer simply as any combination of temporary and permanent workers or employees, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers. Academic Staff Unions of University (ASUU) is labour union that propels the continuous relationship between lecturers and the government. The interface of ASUU and her employer principally revolves around negotiation of contract about pay, revitalization, funding of public universities and other terms and condition of employment of members.

Lawal (2013) is of the opinion that the fundamental purpose of labour union is to promote and protect the interest of their members. It strives to redress the balance of power between employers and employees. In this context, the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) is on the front burner. ASUU has always considered strike as the last option that is potent enough to influence government decisions to her favour. ASUU and Federal Government face-off has become a regular occurrence in recent time, so much that the credibility of academic activities and quality of graduates of public universities in Nigeria are highly contestable.

Needless to emphasize that the recurrent strike actions by the academic staff unions of university has caused lots of damages to university life and Nigerian society in general. Particularly, the students are usually the worse hit as they are usually affected in a number of ways. This includes but not limited to lack of opportunities to make up for lost times and inadequate implementation of curriculum (Ezeagba, 2014; Araga, 2014, Ibrahim, 2015). Additionally, strike action renders both students and lecturers emotionally and psychologically unstable just as it usually prolongs students' academic years while most of the students end up missing the Federal Government compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme as a result of over age.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design is adopted in this study. Kpee (2015) wrote that a descriptive survey research design referred to one in which data is collected from a sample of a given population for describing the pattern or trend of distribution of the elements in a parent population. This design according to him deals with the representative sample of the population, which may be consisting of individuals or items of different attributes.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the educational implications of ASUU strike in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean ratings of lecturers' responses on the educational implication of ASUU strike in Nigeria

S/N	ITEM: Educational implication of ASUU Strike in Nigeria	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Incessant ASUU strike constitutes threats to literacy campaign in Nigeria	2.68	0.68	A
2	Prolonged ASUU strike distorts academic calendar with its negative consequences	2.72	0.71	A
3	ASUU strike discourages admission seekers on the basis of time wastage with its negative implication on university enrolment	2.77	0.60	A
4	Incessant ASUU strike breeds haphazard implementation of curriculum contents in Nigerian public universities	3.86	0.53	SA
5	Incessant ASUU strike contributes to turning most students into certificate seekers who are mostly deficient in their fields of study.	3.51	0.68	SA
6	ASUU strike contributes to brain drain and mass exodus of lecturers in search of more gainful employments	2.76	0.74	A

Grand Mean = 3.05

A = Agreed; SA = Strongly Agreed

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The population comprised all Dean of Faculties, Head of Departments, Heads of different Units and lecturers of the institution. A stratified random sampling technique was used, while the sample size was two hundred (200) respondents; comprising of seven Faculty Deans, twenty H.O.Ds and one hundred and seventy three lecturers; drawn from various faculties of the University. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers with the title, "Implications of Industrial Unrest of Academic Staff Union of Universities Questionnaire (IIUASUUQ)". The instrument was made up of eighteen items, with six items in each cluster that was structured to address each of the three research questions. In order to ensure the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the instrument, the developed questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity using 3 experts, while the reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Estimate. The instrument was administered personally by the five researchers, while the collected data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.50 constitute a benchmark for acceptance of an item as affirmative opinion of respondents. This implies that items with mean scores of 2.49 and below were considered as negative responses of the respondents.

The result of data analysis on table one indicates that most of the respondents answered affirmatively to all the six items therein. This is so because the mean score for each of the items is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 as established in this study. The grand mean score of 3.05 as seen on the

table implies that all the six item statements on the table constitute educational implications of ASUU strike in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: Of what implication is the ASUU strike to the economy of Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean ratings of lecturers' responses on the implication of ASUU strike to the economy of Nigeria

S/N	ITEM: Economic Implication of ASUU Strike in Nigeria	Mean	SD	Decision
7	Most business outfits in student dominated environment hardly survive as a result of incessant industrial disharmony of ASUU	2.83	0.51	A
8	The productivity and economic value of graduates of public universities in Nigeria is lowered by incessant industrial unrest of ASUU	2.66	0.64	A
9	Incessant industrial unrest of ASUU leads to extension of duration of students in school in the face of age sensitivity in the Nigerian labour market	2.78	0.60	A
10	The salaries and allowances of academic staff of universities are mostly withhold during industrial action with its negative implications to staff and their dependents.	3.50	0.43	SA
11	Books and stationeries enterprises and other industries that depend largely on students loose much profit during industrial unrest of ASUU	2.71	0.58	A
12	Unskilled labourers within university environment are mostly laid off from their means of survival during industrial unrest of ASUU	3.63	0.54	SA

Grand Mean = 3.02

A = Agreed; SA = Strongly Agreed

As seen on table two, all the six items therein have mean scores which are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 as established in this study. The grand mean score of 3.02 as seen on the table further implies that all the six item statements on the table constitute negative implications of

incessant ASUU strikes to the economy of Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What is the implication of ASUU strike on security in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean ratings of lecturers' responses on implication of ASUU strike on security in Nigeria

S/N	ITEM: Implication of ASUU Strike on Security in Nigeria	Mean	SD	Decision
13	Incessant industrial unrest of ASUU exposes some students to criminality as result of idleness	3.86	0.52	SA
14	Students sometimes take to streets to protest their continuous stay at home with the associated security risks	2.68	0.73	A
15	Cases of arm robbery involving university undergraduates are usually on the increase during industrial unrest of ASUU	3.71	0.50	SA
16	Prolonged industrial unrest of ASUU pushes some female students to prostitution with its attended security risks	2.90	0.93	A
17	Incessant industrial unrest of ASUU makes students to be easily recruited for poetical motivated violence	3.51	0.68	SA
18	The recent case of EndSARS protest was not totally unconnected to the 2020 nine months industrial unrest of ASUU	2.91	0.54	A

Grand Mean = 3.26

A = Agreed; SA = Strongly Agreed

The result of the data analysis on table three indicates that most of the respondents affirmatively answered to the six item statement as contained on the table. This is so because the mean score for each of the items is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 as established in this study. The grand mean score of 3.26 as seen on the table implies that all the six item statements on the table are ways in which ASUU strike constitute security threats in Nigeria.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Incessant ASUU strike constitutes threats to literacy campaign in Nigeria as it distorts academic calendar and breeds haphazard implementation of curriculum contents amongst other negative educational implications
2. Incessant ASUU strike has lots of negative implication on the economy of Nigeria as salaries and allowances of academic staff of Universities are mostly withhold during prolonged industrial action with its negative economic implications to staff and their dependents. Again, unskilled labourers within university environment are mostly laid off from their means of survival while industries that depend largely on students related materials loose much profit during industrial unrest with its multiplier effect on the economy.
3. Incessant industrial unrest of ASUU has lots of negative security implications as it exposes some students to all manner of criminality as arm robbery involving university undergraduates are usually on the increase while students are easily recruited for politically motivated violence that often lead to loss of life and property

DISCUSSION

The results of the study on table 1 showed that each of the six item statements as contained therein has a mean score which is greater than the criterion mean value of 2.50 as set for the study. The average mean score of 3.05 as obtained on said table is also greater than 2.50 benchmark value of acceptance as stated. This implies that all the six item statements on the table indicate the negative educational implications of ASUU strike in Nigeria. Specifically, it was discovered that incessant ASUU strike constitutes threats to literacy campaign in Nigeria, distorts academic calendar, discourages admission seekers, breeds haphazard implementation of curriculum contents and contributes to turning most students into certificate seekers who are mostly deficient in their fields of study and host of other negative educational implications.

These findings agree with the stand of Eric and Lawal (2013) who lamented that incessant industrial dispute between ASUU and the government of Nigeria has ironically caused much havoc to educational sector in the country, with its negative multiplier effects to other sector of the Nigerian society. They argued that incessant and often prolonged strike of ASUU in most cases, result to battered academic calendar to the detriment of the students that lecturers allegedly fight to

protect. They further argued that ASUU strikes result to abridged semesters and mostly account for the unnecessary delays in the release of Admission list for prospective students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Although, there are verifiable positive educational development that are traceable to ASUU strikes in Nigeria, its repeated occurrences and often prolonged nature are sources of worry to students, parents and indeed, all lovers of education in Nigeria and beyond as academic activities for school year are often distorted due to strikes. Thus, Matthew (2016) argued that ASUU strike is one of the major causes of producing unqualified graduates, who are mostly deficient in their fields of study. This allegation is probably true since teaching and learning is mostly suspended for a long period thereby accounting for the mostly obvious decline in students reading abilities; and in some cases, the knowledge acquired during the learning period is even forgotten by some students. A situation like this invariably turns some students into certificate seekers instead of knowledge seekers with its attended societal ills.

The study also reveals with a grand mean of 3.02 on table two of this study that incessant ASUU strikes has lots of negative implication to the economy of Nigeria. Specifically, the result of the study shows that salaries and allowances of academic staff of Universities are mostly withhold during industrial action with its implications to staff and their dependents; just as books and stationeries enterprises and other industries that depend largely on students loose much profit during industrial unrest of ASUU. The result also indicates that unskilled labourers within university environment are mostly laid off from their means of survival during industrial unrest of ASUU and other negative blow to the economy of Nigeria.

The above findings are in line with the view of Okaka (2011) who stated that the effects of industrial disharmony, with particular reference to ASUU strike in Nigeria have both micro and macro economic implications. At the microeconomic level, the workers of the unions (ASUU) most times lose their immediate pay and hence their market purchasing power that results to reduction in welfare. On the other hand, the employer whose workers are on strike loses the union services and as a result becomes unable to meet their obligations and manpower needs, which invariably affect marginal utility and per capital income. Similarly, the scholar argued that ASUU strike results to loss of output of goods and services at the macroeconomic level; while firms that largely dependent on universities for patronage are mostly affected and their production slows down or comes to a halt. At the long-run the society are part of those that bear the brunt. Needless to state therefore that a harmonious workplace that ensures that the workers' aspirations are considerably satisfied and the employer's expectations are relatively met is very paramount for high productivity. Thus, meeting the aspirations of ASUU and employers' expectations, are essential conditions for industrial peace to avert the economic quagmire that are associated with prolonged ASUU strikes.

The grand mean of 3.26 as seen in table three revealed that ASUU strike constitutes lots of negative security implications in Nigeria. The results specifically show that incessant

industrial unrest of ASUU exposes some students to criminality as students sometimes take to streets to protest their continuous stay at home with the associated security risks. The findings also showed that cases of arm robbery involving university undergraduates are usually on the increase during industrial unrest of ASUU while other students are easily recruited for politically motivated violence that often lead to loss of life and property.

The findings of table three of this study, are in line with the view of Nwokocha (2015) who posited that incessant strikes of ASUU pose lots of danger to the already deteriorating security situation in Nigeria. He argued that corruption, laziness of students, increase in crimes in the society, degrading academic profile of Nigeria, loss of jobs, inactive economic activities and delay in registration of graduate students with NYSC, just to mention only but a few are amongst the negative implications of ASUU strike. It could be rightly argued that such strike periods also have the tendency of leading undergraduates into some social vices like prostitution, oil bunkering etc as an idle man, they say is the devils workshop!

CONCLUSION

The negative implications of prolonged ASUU strikes in Nigeria are multidimensional and catastrophic. Several scholars have listed many and emphasized the need for industrial harmony between government and ASUU to avert the calamity on Nigerians. It is however identified that incessant ASUU strikes in Nigeria have had negative impact on government, parents, educational institutions, students and lecturers to mention but a few. Generally, this study hinged the implications of the incessant strikes on education, economy and security sectors of Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should make policies that are dynamic and long lasting. Policies on education should not be left for every government to change; rather every government should build on the policies that have been set before. The minister and commissioners of education should not be chosen unilaterally instead, they should be appointed from a group of senior career educationists to achieve excellence and promote academic standards in all ramifications.
2. The government through the ministries of education, labour and productivity and their parastatals such as the NUC should always be alive to their responsibilities in ensuring that agreements are properly harmonized and implemented in line with the stipulated principles. There should be an Education Think Tank who would always look at issues before it boils over. In line with UNESCO's declaration, government should progressively increase education budget annually to 26 percent. ASUU strikes in this 21st century should not be indefinite anymore. One day to one week is alright so that we will not throw away the baby and the bath water and make the

university system go comatose with its ripple negative effects on the economy.

3. The university staff should be well sensitized on the purpose and vision of their institutions. This purpose and vision should be clearly shared to all educational stakeholders. Affirmative actions should be taken for the actualization of this vision. Staff should work within the outlined principle of their institutions and the policies of education. ASUU should also work with the understanding that they are training the leaders of the future. They have the responsibility to drastically reduce the societal ills by impacting into the youths what they want the future to be.

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