



## **Overcoming Educational Corruption as Panacea for Peace Building: The FG/ASUU Perspective**

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### ***Abstract***

*Universities have a critical role in supporting knowledge-driven economic growth and national development. Also, the generation of new knowledge is turning out to be a significant function of universities worldwide. However, it has been observed that challenges confronting the Nigerian University system are enormous, leading to industrial actions despite several policies and agreements between different staff bodies in the universities system and Federal Government. This work examines disputes arising as a result of the Federal Government of Nigeria non-implementation of agreements with The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) despite the parties' promises. The study also reveals other forms of corruptions in the academic sector. This study relied on secondary sources for information, and a desk review study was undertaken, while conflict theory was adopted as a guide. The paper found rot in the universities system on the one hand, and corruption in the case of Federal Government in non-implementation of signed agreements on the other hand, as the significant causes of instability in the Nigerian Universities system. This paper, therefore, recommends that disputants should make use of more mediation with collective bargaining than negotiation. Better still, there is a need for early intervention of dispute*

*resolution tools, where the agreement will be implemented amicably between parties involved.*

**Keywords:** *University, Collective Bargaining, Agreement, Corruption, Development.*

## **Introduction**

Universities are significant to developing any country through their research and technological innovations; such institutions need to be upgraded through modern learning facilities to make their impacts known and compete equally with their counterparts in other parts of the world. In line with this, Eze, Chined-Eze, and Bello (2018) established that most institutions in Nigeria are not using modern technology for teaching. There is a need for these institutions to change the old ways and strategies of education and include e-learning in their educational programs. To achieve this, the provision of sound and qualified lecturers are needed with better remuneration (salary and allowances) and the requirement of a conducive learning environment. As essential for better results, to equip the higher learning institutions with modern teaching facilities and producing qualified graduates that will make more significant input towards sustainable growth of the nation. The Academic Staff Union of

Universities (ASUU) had frequently without number demanded better condition of services such as improvement of the entire university system, provision for an adequate proportion of students-lecturers ratio in all public institutions, finding a solution to the problem of brain drain, funding of the universities for better infrastructures to create a conducive environment for learning and teaching for both students and lecturers (Koleoso, 2013).

Oloyede (2015) opined that between 1983 and 2001, several agreements were signed between the ASUU and Federal Government (FG) to develop the university system in Nigeria. Both parties willingly entered these agreements, only for the FG to abandon the implementation halfway, which has always triggered ASUU grievance and frequently leads to disputes between the two parties. In the same vein, Oludayo (2021) reported that as of December 2020, the federal government again failed to fulfil the three agreements that both

parties reached; all channelled to the promise of the ₦40 billion earned academic/earned allowance. The breach of the agreement by the government has always been the cause of faceoff between the parties. Meanwhile, Nico (2012) argued that dispute is inevitable. It is a necessary part of daily life and must be managed well; however, the skills lie in how individuals, organizations, and government handle it. Tools to settle dispute contain the 'Tried and Trusted' methods used by wise, experienced people worldwide to transform conflict they face into opportunities. ASUU and Federal Government, over the years, have been involved in disputes, and these disputes are mostly settled through negotiation/collective bargaining (Ogbete, Eke & Ori, 2017). Still, it is worrisome that the disputes resolution tools have not brought lasting solutions towards resolving the crisis between the duo, as ASUU strikes have been expressed and experienced frequently in Nigeria's educational system.

While strike action is seen worldwide as one of the means used by the Labour Union to express their dissatisfaction in any organization, it comes in when all tools to resolve disputes between the union and the Government prove abortive. Strike action is known as the only measure of making employers of labour know Nigerian employees' feelings, even Wokoma (2011) recorded that strikes are most explicit form of industrial conflict in Nigeria.

The labour union's primary functions include protecting the interest of registered members through the defense of the best possible terms and conditions of their employment. Ajayi (2014) argues that this reasoning directs attention to the point that some strikes are the expression of protests against model rules, practices, and anomalies in the rule regulating jobs and the demands to change the situation. Example of this system includes strike action directed towards improvement in the environment of work rather than work environment"

*“It worries some that strike actions among staff unions in the Nigerian University system have taken a line of competition as union bodies employ strikes competitively and concurrently, making their demands unending. The success of one union probably encourages other unions to table their request; once a union achieved its mission through strike action, other union demands follow, which usually leads to another strike action. Indeed, this has led to a proliferation of*

*unions within the same system. However, the effect of these strikes are negatively seen in Nigeria academic sector as it alters academic curriculum and educational processes; an implication which has caused a tremendous setback for most Nigerian University students" (Oloyede 2015:3).*

Not all strike actions are channelled towards the improvement of academic standards. Some strikes are for personal gain, towards the betterment of the workers, such as increment in salary and extension of retirement age, making the students be at the receiving end feel the pain most. According to Ajayi (2014:2), "when the students are apprehended, their academics are abruptly truncated."

Hence, this paper explores educational corruption arising from the breach of the agreement between ASUU and FG. Adesulu (2013) observed that Nigerian Universities have witnessed over 23 strike actions between the 1980s and 2013. Also, Yusuf (2020) has reported that lecturers in the Nigerian universities had embarked on strikes fifteen times between 1999 and 2020 which shows that about one-fifth or twenty percent of the years of democracy since 1999 are marked with ASUU strike actions. With all the strike actions and faceoff arising from non-implementations of agreement on the part of the Federal Government. ASUU and FG are becoming a significant problem among the stakeholders, as this has resulted in instability leading to a lower standard and ridiculous rating of Nigerian graduates and institutions. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the conflict theory. According to Ineji, Duke and Ndoma (2014), "Conflict Theory is premised on the disorder, disagreement and open hostility among individuals and groups. disorder or disagreement happens where lack of harmony is part of the system." The study further stated that "conflict within the society is shown mainly through public protests and industrial disputes (strikes and lockouts).

### **Conceptual Clarification:**

Literatures revealed that between 1983 and 2020, there were several agreements between the ASUU and the FG to develop the education sector. In 1983, there was a negotiation on Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS) between ASUU and the FG. This became an issue of dispute in 1988 because of the lack

of implementation of the prior agreement. Failure on the part of the government to implement those policies that were negotiated to conclude previous disputes has been a constant factor in subsequent conflicts (Oguu 2012) (Yusuf 2020). Following ever agreements reached by ASUU and the federal government on how to better academic in Nigeria, disputes always comes up as a result of bridged of agreement; several industrial actions were recorded by Nigerian Universities between the year 2003 and 2020 based on non-implementation of the issues agreed upon by the ASUU and the FG (Adesulu 2013), (Yusuf 2020). Odiagbe (2012) argues that the federal government has defined the ASUU dispute politically by refusing to honour the previous agreements and attempting to change the process or framework of collective bargaining. In Onyeonoru (2010) contribution, he asserted that the 1992 strike of ASUU called for a review method every three years, such as an agreement made to reflect social and economic changes, including inflationary trends and costs of living. However, the Government, for instance, refused to review the deal when it was due in May 1995, but in 1996 FG commenced negotiation with ASUU again. On May 15, 1996, the then Minister of Education, M.T. Liman, unilaterally aborted the negotiations and announced the proscription of ASUU at the national level in a bid to coerce the intellectuals back to work (rather than embark on bargaining). In alliance with university administrators, the Government subjected the university teachers to several forms of humiliation, harassment, physical violence, starvation, and job losses. However, the attempt did not yield its mission as the strike was dragged beyond the expected end when the parties had to sit in bargaining.

### **Strikes**

Cessation of work, refusal to work or refusal to continue work by two or more employees acting in combination, in concert, or under a shared understanding to compel their employer to agree to terms or conditions of employment, a definition given by (Alberta Labour Relations Board 2004) on strike. A strike occurs when the workers initiate a stoppage by refusing to report to work; authors like Cramton and Tracy (1992) gave reasons for its occurrence, including perceived maltreatment and breakdown of agreement. Cramton and Tracy (2002) also concluded that most strikes result from faulty negotiation, while Lacroix (1986) opined that strikes occur when the firm does not pay the expected wages of the rank and file.

### **Collective Bargaining:**

Collective bargaining is rooted in the relationship between an employer and employees in an organization. Alluding to this, the International Labour Organization reaffirmed in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as it explains that collective bargaining is a crucial means through which employers and their organizations and even trade unions can establish fair wages and working conditions. It provides the basis for sound labour relations. It is also seen as how working people, through their associations, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine their terms of employment. These include paying benefits, extra hours, leave, job health, safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2021).

Collective bargaining is a mutual exchange of positions followed by an agreement involving employees and employers with a "community of interest" to negotiate a binding written contract with an employer. It allows workers to express themselves in their workplace, making collective bargaining a respected approach that has been valued by employees and employers in the private sector and throughout various levels of government. De-Silva (1996) argues that collective bargaining is an industrial relations mechanism or tool that is also seen as negotiation. Also, in the view of Gernigon, Odero & Guido (2000), the study argues that collective bargaining is deemed to be the activity or process leading up to the conclusion of a cooperative agreement. Stephens (2011) gave the advantage of collective bargaining as settlement through dialogue and consensus rather than conflict or confrontation.

Meanwhile, effective bargaining is based on ideas that resonate with workers and employers, such as working together to solve problems and treat each other respectfully. Parties exchange the frank views of their constituents as they explore and resolve the issues being bargained. When labour and management understand agreement on salary and benefits, it improves teaching and learning conditions as everyone benefits (Hagedorn, Alexandra & Hagopian, 2016). Also, Ugbomhe and Osagie (2019) said that collective bargaining is a process used by employers and unions to agree to terms and conditions of employment; this means that individuals cannot negotiate their contracts; instead, the union negotiates as 'a collective' on behalf of all members.

Once a trade union is recognized in a workplace, the negotiations they have with the employer are called collective bargaining; these negotiations would be

regarded as terms and conditions of employment (Kwesi & Esnart, 2020). Collective conciliation can move parties towards a resolution of a dispute through the expertise of an impartial and independent third party (Potocnik, Chaudhry & Bernal-Valencia, 2019). Where collective bargaining has led to an agreement, it is called a collective agreement (Gernigon, Odero & Guido, 2000). Collective agreements within the workplace can cover both union and non-union staff as trade unions often negotiate on behalf of the staff employed in a specific group. Therefore, collective bargaining is a way of solving workplace problems. Dugard, Porter, Ikawa and Chenwi (2020) reveals issues on the bargaining to include agenda are wages, working time, training, occupational health, and equal treatment. The objective of these negotiations is to arrive at an agreement that affects the terms and conditions of employment. Collective agreements address the rights and responsibilities of the parties, thus ensuring harmonious and productive industries and workplaces (ILO, 2021).

In this interest, the government and Academic union enter into agreements towards reaching an amicable solution to fashion out a burning issue. Unfortunately, such intention failed due to the inability of parties to implement such mutual understanding, which ends up in disputes and strikes. The leading cause of ASUU's struggle with the Federal Government was insincerity found in the Federal Government, each time the agreement was due for negotiation. Federal Government would not be ready to implement those agreements it willingly entered into with ASUU. Non-adherent to the agreement signed formed the basis of struggles resulting from striking actions since the 1980s till 2020 in Nigeria, amounting to a loss of productive hours, and leaving in the hearts of many that the image of FG is not right both at local and international levels (Ogbete, Eke & Ori, 2017), (Bello, & Isa 2016).

### **Disputes**

The dispute is a specific disagreement concerning a matter of fact, law, or policy. A claim or assertion of one party meeting with refusal, counter-claim, or denial by another (Nzuve, 2013). Nico (2012) believes that dispute is inevitable in domestic and international relations and, supporting this, (Diko, 2010:5) asserted that “dispute is an inevitable aspect of human relations, due to varied perception and incompatibility ideas, goals, opinion, belief, motivation and emotions.” Also, Jones (2016) describes disputes as a disagreement on law or fact, a conflict of legal views or interests between two persons and in another

case. In the same vein, Audu and Kusoro (2012) referred to the dispute as a situation in which the two sides held opposite views concerning the question of performance or non-performance of specific treaty obligations. Therefore, a dispute is any grievance, conflict, disagreement between or among parties, which at different occasions do ensue between the government and Academic Staff Union of Universities due to breakdown of agreements.

### **Corruption**

The concept of corruption is widely seen as the use of public office for private gains. Myint

(2000) submitted that it is the use of official position, rank, or status by an office bearer for his benefit. The study observed that there is a growing worldwide concern over corruption. Thus enumerated three factors that could be responsible; firstly, the universality of corruption which exists in all countries, both developed and developing, in the public and private sectors and as well as in non-profit and charitable organizations. Secondly, the allegations over the involvement and the role corruption play in politics in recent times, making organizations and business firms tarnished on account of dishonesty. Lastly, the study affirmed that corruption could be a significant obstacle in the process of economic development and in modernizing a country. Thus, there is an urgent need to curb corruption for a country's development to sustain peace (Myint, 2000).

Makpor & Akpede (2014), in his contribution, sees corruption as the intentional noncompliance with arm's length relationship aimed by deriving some advantages from this behaviour for oneself or related individuals. For instance, it includes police collecting bribes on the highway, parents manipulating to secure admission from their children in schools, and even ghost workers on pay-rolls. These show that corruption is inclusive at all levels, sectors, communities, and religious settings. Also, Myint (2000) posits that corruption is not predictable and is not a life sentence for a country or government. Still, the quality of leadership in government could be determined if there is corruption or not. Myint (2000) further stated that a critical factor in opposing corruption levels across countries and within the same country over time depends on leadership quality. Leaders who respect the rule of law should emphasize transparency in their dealings in the offices they oversee and take action against subordinates found violating rules, and exhibit integrity in their transactions can

make a difference. In Nigeria, it has become some reoccurrences on the part of the government to make promises to various sectors. Even the masses, in the end, found not fulfilling the contract. Chapman (2002) concluded that leaders could be a powerful force in reducing corruption. Still, when top leadership is corrupt, they lack the moral platform to demand honesty in others because they are fraudulent.

High-level corruption behaviour is not attributable to low pay and out of necessity to meet their families' living expenses. Instead, greed is considered a primary motivating factor (Myint, 2000). However, incidences of corruption vary among societies. It can be rare, widespread, or systemic; when crime becomes widespread, it is more difficult to control and deal with, but the worst scenario is when it becomes systemic. When systemic corruption takes hold of a country, the institutions, rules, and people's behaviour and attitudes become adapted to the corrupt way of doing things. Crime becomes a way of life among the people (Myint, 2000). Systemic corruption is complicated to overcome, and it can have a devastating effect on the economy, its indicators are connected and rooted in social, political and economic dynamic. The end show of crime would create a wide gap between the privilege and less privilege and reduces economic growth (Kirya, 2019).

The concept of greed has been fundamental in noncompliance to negotiation and bargaining from the Academic Staff Union of the Universities and the Federal Government. This greed level from parties has created the platform for many sharp practices resulting in a lack of trust, accountability, and transparency. Hence, crisis activation has become an inevitable occurrence in the educational sector.

### **Education and its rot in Nigeria**

Youths are the future leaders of any country. The success of any nation depends on its educational system, where they learn new ideas and achieve further knowledge towards building any nation, meaning that the nation's national security depends significantly upon the educational system to produce able leaders. If the educational sector fails to make able leaders, then the country is doomed. Nigerian educational system has individuals who are perpetually preoccupied with looking for ways to exploit the society for their advantage instead of contributing positively to the advancement of the community (Oloyede, 2015). Mehlinger and Powers (2019) viewed education as the

foundation upon which physical and technological developments rest. He views it as a veritable tool in developing any nation and the developing ones in particular. Like other national development sectors, corruption could pose a threat to educational systems.

### **Forms of Corruption in the Educational System in Nigeria**

This paper focuses on corruption in the educational system, revealing the Federal Government as the body responsible for the cause of continuous strikes in the tertiary institutions. Hence, this study briefly mentions other forms of corruption found in the universities among lecturers and students. Corruption in the educational sector varies from one country to the other. Hallak & Poisson (2007) defines corruption in the educational sector as the systematic use of public office for personal benefits. The impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and its consequences show on access, quality, or equity of education.

Various studies on corruption trace its causes and effects on countries' economies, political and social development. Also, researches have revealed corruption associated with the educational system as an act that cannot be overlooked until the action is overcome. When corruption is observed at the foundation point of entering the school, bribing for admission and additional marks from lecturers brings severe consequences to the educational system.

*Chapman (2002:7) observed that actual damage to society occurs when entire generations of youth are given wrong education to believe that personal success comes not through merit and hard work but favouritism, bribery, fraud, and corruption. Such negative lessons have the potential to undermine civil society well into the future.*

Michelson Institute (2006) Funds released for purchases of teaching materials and renovation of school buildings embezzled; sub-standard educational materials are purchased, manufacturers and suppliers of those goods are bribed. Instructors' copyrights; school property used for private-commercial purposes; students carrying out unpaid labour for the benefit of the staff; staff and lecturers exploiting and abusing pupils in many different ways both physically and sexually; staff and lecturers' recruitment and postings influenced by bribes or

sexual favours; selling of examination questions in advance; and ghost teachers are all academic corruption.

Samuel (2021) declared that corruption had been noted in almost every sphere of the Nigerian economy, including the education sector, ranging from embezzlement of funds intended for teachers' training, renovating classrooms, and equipping libraries. Also, he noted as part of the corruption in the education sector that in some cases, school fees collected are often not used for what it is intended for but end in embezzlement. The effect of corruption on the educational system in Nigeria was mentioned by Nwankwo and Nweke (2016). It is noted that crime in academics can be located among the school proprietors, parents, policymakers, examination councils, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, and deeds limiting the standard of education in the country with consequences of living the students half-baked when their academic years are completed.

Canfield (2011) argues that corruption in the classroom can prevent access to education, particularly for disadvantaged groups, and severely impact the quality of the students' education. Canfield (2011) gave an overview of prior research to conclude that corrupt countries tend to spend less on education because of fewer opportunities to extract bribes within the education sector than in other sectors. Chapman (2002) concluded that corruptions among educators such as Vice-Chancellors, heads of the departments, deans, and faculty members are outrageous, ranging from the diversion of funds and school supplies. Sometimes the food that the schools receive from the community or government is used for personal consumption. These educators assess unauthorized fees for real or imaginary services. The study revealed that Nigerian universities' lecturers embarking on incessant strikes and collecting salaries for work not done are all forms of corruption in the academic.

Torulagha (2013) has noted corruption in public and private universities' educational sector, stating that today's educational sector seems to produce graduates who are not sufficiently disciplined and equipped with the appropriate academic and professional skills. So they have no fears about breaking the law; they continuously look for shortcuts to accumulate wealth. Many university graduates have turned liars, cheats, manipulators, bullies, and abusers while getting jailed or killed in some instances.

Apart from inducement and manipulations in the academic sector, sexual advances also exist among teachers and students in the Nigerian university system. Though sexual harassment is not new in human life, it flows from

generation to generation between man and woman and there are also practices of homosexuality, lesbianism among young adults in the institutions. Sexual harassment is increasing in recent years, mostly among old and young, leading to abuse of younger ones in the female gender (UNICEF, 2021), (Cotter, & Savage 2019). Different governments, agencies, bodies, and non-governmental organizations have a stand against this behaviour. Despite the fight against it, it has been on increase instead of decrease mainly in the developing states and warring nations (World Health Organization (WHO), 2009).

Hill and Kearn (2011) study that sexual harassment at school can include making verbal or written comments, making gestures, displaying pictures or images, using physical coercion, or any combination of these actions. Sexual harassment can occur within a person or through electronic means such as text messages and social media. Taiwo, Omole, and Omole (2014) has seen the issues surrounding sexual harassment and victimization globally as a matter of concern that is gradually becoming a public discourse. The study confirmed that higher institutions are becoming breeding grounds for antisocial behaviours and have negatively affected academic freedom and excellence in Nigeria. Taiwo, Omole, and Omole (2014) believed that higher education institutions in Nigeria had not been left out of the saga. For instance, in Nigeria, sex for grades in tertiary institutions is a reality. The male lecturers, in particular, perceived themselves as thin gods, and such unprofessional behavior can be said to be perpetual unchecked. Corroborating this point, Torulagha (2013) submits that the trend occurrence in sexual harassment in the school takes several forms: from male lecturer to the female student, from male students to female students, and even non-academic staff and female students. Many female students justify being bankrupt to relying totally on their womanhood for making money and getting high grades without due preparation for the examination. All these and even more are instances that form corruption in the Nigerian universities system.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Conflict theory propounded by Marx and further explained by Wright Mills centres on the reasons and effects of division conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, on the economic, social, and political implications of the rise of capitalist society in society. The conflict theory is premised on a powerful minority class (the bourgeoisie) and an oppressed majority class (the

proletariat). This created class conflict because the two interests were at odds, and resources were evenly distributed. An unequal social order was maintained through ideological coercion in the system, which created consensus, value acceptability, expectations, and conditions as determined by the bourgeoisie. Marx reasoned that at the point where the socio-economic conditions of the proletariat become worse, they would formulate a class consciousness that revealed their exploitation at the hands of the wealthy capitalist class of bourgeoisie. The proletariat would oppose to ideas of the bourgeoisie, make a revolution demanding changes. According to Marx, if the modification made to appropriate conflict maintained a capitalist system, the conflict would resurface. Still, if the changes create a new [technique such as socialism](#), the outcome would bring peace and stability (Mills, 1956).

The summary of the theory is premised on the disorder, disagreement, open hostility and enmity among individuals and groups, and lack of harmony in system parts. Ineji, Duke, and Ndoma (2014) opined that "conflict within the society is expressed through public protest, industrial conflicts (strikes and lockouts) as found in 2013 FG/ASUU industrial conflicts. This majorly centred on non-implementation of agreements of 2009 and renegotiation of 2011, leading to 2012 memorandum of understanding signed by both parties."

## **Conclusion**

This research observed that it is necessary to clean the Nigerian educational sector because education is rated among the most powerful and efficient instruments of socialization. Indeed, after the family and possibly religion, education follows as the most important agent of socializing children and youths; therefore, there is a need for the crusade of anti-corruption in the educational sector. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to tackle corruption in the educational sector. It may sound impossible to wipe out corruption, but it can be reduced to the barest minimum. At the same time, educational institutions still linger in immoral behaviour. Torulagha (2013) said that in curbing corruption in the educational system, those at the helm of the affairs should know that their position should be more proactive to responsibilities. Parties in bargain making should note that the agreement reached must be fulfilled. The Federal government should be conscious of its public image. Also, Federal Government should put the policy in place to regulate strike actions;

this should ensure that all available dispute resolution tools must be wholly employed before a strike can be applied.

### **Recommendations:**

- i. Parties in collective bargaining are required to abide by the agreement. Hence, the Federal Government should avoid the lack of implementing any agreements reached.
- ii. The Proliferation of union bodies in the Nigerian Universities system is seen as one of the hindrances to the smooth running of the academic process due to competitive demands; therefore, such bodies may be merged to still which will still achieve their aims.
- iii. Research also recommends that parties in dispute should avoid signing any agreement that may be unachievable.
- iv. Party disputes may invite other stakeholders in the educational sector before the agreement is made to avoid signing unachievable promises.
- v. Incessant strike action in the Nigerian universities system leads to students roaming on the street, which plays a significant role in society's insecurities. Therefore, mutual implementation of policies is highly recommended.

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