

## Research Article

# Strike Action and Employee Performance in Nigeria Public University

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**Abstract**

The study examined the impact of strike action on employee performance in public University in Bayelsa State. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of 150 employees which comprises academic staff of Niger Delta University Amassoma, Bayelsa State. 135 sample size was determined using Taro Yamene formula. Data collected from the respondents via questionnaire were analyzed using sample frequency distribution, while hypotheses were tested using chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) formula at 0.05 probability level. Findings revealed that the causes of strike actions in tertiary institutions arise due to unnecessary protocols imposed by those in the accounts department or salaries lodged in personal accounts for interests. The study also revealed that wage reductions, resulting from several sources such as taxes, government policies, management initiated institutional welfare etc remain vital reasons for strike actions in institutions of higher learning. Based on the findings, the study concluded that strike action is an ongoing trend in institutions and eradication measures could be used painstakingly, but possible, and when adopted could bring about a relief in industrial peace and stability in tertiary institutions like Niger Delta University. The study therefore, recommends amongst others that autonomy of tertiary institutions should be an issue that demands urgent approval to avoid unnecessary interference of government in the internal affairs of tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** *strike; employee, performance, public University.*

**Introduction**

Strikes are the main element in any industrial conflict. A strike is a short cessation of labor undertaken to address grievances or trade disputes, as allowed by emergency provisions. The term "strike" is defined by Decree, 1968 as the deliberate stoppage of work by a group of employees, who are acting together and refusing to continue working for an employer due to a dispute. The purpose of a strike is to compel the employer, or any other individual or group, to either accept or reject certain terms of employment and working conditions. Strikes can also be used to support other workers in their efforts to compel their employers to take certain actions. The order further clarifies that "cessation of work" refers to the intentional act of working at a slower pace or with reduced efficiency compared to the normal standards. Hippo (1984) and Alugbuo (2000) have observed that the planned and coordinated withdrawal of labor, commonly known as a strike, is the most well recognized form of industrial action. The potential for a strike represents the most powerful economic leverage that the union can exert on the company. Power has an impact on the employer's authority to control the company and oversee the employees (Anele, 2018, Anele, 2020). Collective bargaining cannot exist without the potential for a strike (Anugwom, 2007; Anele, 2018; Anele, 2020). Practically, it has proven challenging to distinguish strikes from other manifestations of industrial disputes, since employers may lock out workers and workers themselves may initiate strike actions. Both phenomena should be considered integral components of the conflict scenario, rather than being seen as opposing forces. Seldom does a strike arise solely from a singular matter in an evident situation.

The occurrence of a strike is contingent upon various elements, such as the current circumstances (Fajanh, 2005; Sen, 2015). A strike, also known as a labor strike or industrial action, is a collective refusal by employees to work, resulting in a work stoppage. A strike typically occurs as a result of employee grievances (Otobo, 2005). According to Denga (2009), strikes are occasionally employed as a means of exerting pressure on the government to modify its policies. In certain cases, strikes have resulted in the destabilization of a specific political party or ruler. Strikes in such instances frequently constitute a component of a wider social movement, manifesting as a concerted effort of civil resistance. An exemplary instance is the cessation of labor by the indigenous railway workers in 1982, spearheaded by Pa Michael Modu during the colonial period, as well as the inaugural nationwide work stoppage in 1945 in Nigeria. From 1970 to the present, the number of strike activities has increased due to workers' demands for improved working conditions and higher compensation. This is because management often fails to adequately meet the requirements and requests of employees, even during times of economic distress. In recent times, the tertiary education sub-sector in Nigeria has seen frequent closures as a result of industrial strikes.

The impact of these recurrent school closures and academic program disruptions on kids' learning efficacy is best comprehended through visualization rather than verbal description. Tertiary education in Nigeria has been severely hindered due to strikes carried out by both the academic (ASUU) and non-teaching personnel, resulting in significant setbacks. This has consistently exposed the students to deplorable conditions, resulting in the disruption of academic programs, granting students undeserved extensions in their study years, diminished attention of students on academic programs, and a weakened lecturer-student relationship, among other issues. As a result, pupils' academic performance has significantly declined, while instances of examination malpractice are increasing (Adeyemi, 2010; Babafaros, 2013). Universities are universally recognized as the bastions of education, the source of intellectual growth, and a breeding ground for future leaders. Investment in university education is a crucial aspect of national development efforts worldwide (Adeyemi, 2010; Aman, 2010). In 2007, ASUU initiated a three-month industrial action. In May 2008, the organization conducted a two-week "warning strike" to advocate for various objectives, such as an enhanced compensation structure and the restoration of forty-nine teachers who were terminated from the University of Ilorin in 1998. In June 2009, the Academic Staff Union of colleges (ASUU) instructed its members in federal and state colleges across the country to commence an indefinite strike due to disputes with the federal government regarding an agreement that was made with the union around two and a half years earlier. In October 2009, following a three-month period of industrial action, ASUU and other staff unions reached an agreement with the government and ended the strike by signing a memorandum of understanding. Prior to the recent industrial action taken by ASUU, the National Executive Council (NEC) of the union convened from Tuesday 29th November to Thursday 1st December, 2011 at the University of Port Harcourt. The purpose of the meeting was to assess the progress made in implementing the 2009 ASUU/government agreement, among other matters. The indefinite strike by the union for forty-nine days was caused by the lack of understanding between the two parties regarding the compliance with the 2011 ASUU/FGN memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the implementation of the agreement, the government's unilateral dissolution of universities governing councils, the ongoing institutional accreditation and the state of the

action, and the issue of alleged removal of fuel subsidy. The event was subsequently cancelled on February 1st, 2012. ASUU initiated a warning strike on August 30th, 2012. All of these factors have had a negative impact on the academic endeavors of university students, leading to disruptions in the academic calendar and adversely affecting student performance. On July 1, 2013, ASUU initiated a six-month industrial action that was terminated on December 17, 2013. This had a significant impact on Nigerian undergraduates, resulting in their engagement in numerous undesirable behaviors. ASUU initiated a period of industrial action on November 5th, 2018, which lasted about three months and a few more days. The industrial action was concluded on February 4th, 2019. ASUU initiated an eight-month industrial strike from February 2022 to October 2022. Frequently, the persistent disturbances caused by ASUU often lead to industrial action by related associations such as SUU, NASU, SSANU, etc. (Fayana, 2000).

## **Statement of the problem**

ASUU and other trade unions in Nigerian universities are demanding that the government execute a deal made in 2009 about the rescue of the nation's institutions from imminent failure. However, the administration is suggesting a fragmented and discriminatory strategy. Undoubtedly, education is of utmost importance for the existence of any nation, and it should be seen as a topic that is separate from politics or evasive debates. Nigeria's current efforts in providing education for its children are insufficient by global standards, which is undesirable. From the administration's perspective, there are other items vying for the few monies available, and the government is not adequately prioritizing the construction of infrastructure in Nigerian colleges. This has led to significant conflicts between the government and certain industrial unions, such as ASUU, resulting in ongoing industrial strikes. The persistent strikes carried out by the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) and other labor unions have unintentionally impacted the academic progress of university students. These strikes often present significant obstacles to their study timelines, performance in exams, and final grades. The pupils are experiencing prolonged absence from school, with many of them being completely isolated from academic activities due to unfavorable home conditions that hinder productive and demanding academic engagement. The student and their parents are exasperated due to the prolonged anticipation of school restart, which remains distant. Some students, when they are at home with nothing to do, become involved in activities that are not related to their studies. They can be easily enticed to engage in criminal crimes, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and rape, while also promoting cultism. This has rendered them a menace to the societal tranquility and lawfulness in Nigeria. Based on the researcher's understanding, there is currently a scarcity of study on how to effectively handle the frequent strikes in Nigeria's education sector.

Although there have been multiple strike actions in Nigerian public colleges, there has been a lack of research to investigate the causes of these strikes and offer solutions to address or minimize their frequency. This study aims to investigate the impact of strike action on staff performance in Niger Delta University.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to examine the effect of strike action on employee performance in Nigerian Universities.

**Specifically, the objectives were:**

- To determine the extent of effect of strike action on commitment
- To ascertain the extent of eradication of strike on commitment

**Research Questions**

To achieve the above objectives, the following questions were posed

1. To what extent does the effect of strike action commitment?
2. To what extent does the eradication of strike action commitment?

**Null Hypotheses**

In order to address the above research objectives and questions, the following hypotheses were raised.

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between effect of strike action and commitment

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between eradication of strike action and commitment

**Methodology**

**Table 1: Effects of strike actions on our universities**

S/N	No. of questions item	Responses			
		Yes	%	No	%
1	Frustration and disillusionment with schooling experienced by students	60	44.5	75	55.6
2	Shutting of schools frequently	90	66.7	45	33.3
3	Interruptions to the academic schedule and other school-related activities	116	85.9	19	14.1
4	Anomalies in academic programmes	103	76.3	32	23.7
5	Cultism and cheating among students during exams	70	51.9	65	48.1
6	Low-quality graduates are of low quality in comparison to other nations	30	22.2	105	77.8
7	Certificate racketeering	80	59	56	41
8	Decreased output and diminishing concentration on goals	42	31.1	93	68.9
9	Lack of dedication and disappointment	50	37.1	85	62.9
10	The decline of higher education as an honourable institution	108	80	27	20

Source: Research survey 2023.

From table 1 above the following items with the percentage of 50 and above have been accepted as the effects of industrial actions on tertiary institutions, which are closure of schools frequently, 66.7% irregularity of academic programmes, 76.3% examination

This study utilized the survey design to investigate the academic staff of Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Bayelsa State. The Taro Yamane formula was employed to determine the sample size for a finite population. The purpose of this formula is to determine the precise sample size required for this investigation to obtain accurate results. The primary instrument utilized in the research for gathering data was the questionnaire, which was distributed to a specific group of academic personnel at the university (NDU). The sample size for this investigation was calculated using Toro Yamane's formula. The research instrument used in this study underwent a validity test. The tool was provided to a group of consulting specialists specializing in knowledge management. Their feedback aided the researcher in making essential revisions and confirmed the validity of the questionnaire.

Reliability was assessed by conducting a test-retest technique on a sample of elements. This method determined the consistency of the instrument, resulting in an alpha value of 0.84. This alpha value was considered for the investigation, as it exceeded the null hypothesis criterion of 0.7. The study utilized a sample frequency distribution and employed the chi-square test to evaluate the hypotheses. The hypotheses were evaluated using the chi-square (x2) formula at a significance level of 0.03.

**Findings /Discussion**

malpractice and cultism among students, 51.9% certificate racketeering, 59% and erosion of dignity and respect of higher education 80%.

**Table 2: Measures to eradicate strike actions in university**

S/N	No. of questions item	Responses			
		Yes	%	No	%
11	Banning of union activities in higher educational institutions	75	55.6	60	44.4
12	Encouraging positive industrial relations and involvement with government	40	29.6	95	70.4
13	Ensuring efficiency in management involvement	90	66.7	45	33.3
14	Stifling all aspects of collective bargaining	89	65.9	46	34.1
15	Establishing panels of industrial arbitrators to examine periodic work intervals	69	51.1	66	48.9
16	Constant negotiation and dialogue	99	73.3	36	26.7
17	Labour matters should be handled only in courts	30	22.2	105	77.8
18	Allowing third-party negotiators to work with both employees and employers	100	74.1	35	25.9
19	Following this first round of negotiations, both management and workers will focus on labor-related rules and regulations.	104	77.1	31	22.9

Source: Research survey 2023.

The following percentages 50 and above have been approved as measures to ban trade unionism at higher education institutions, also known as industrial actions, according to table 2 above: 55.6% make sure managers are efficient, 66.7% make sure all parts of collective bargaining are stiff, 15.9% make sure there is constant conversation and negotiation, 73.3% make sure both employees and employers can choose their side in a negotiation, and 74.1% make sure there is no party winning.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The impact of strike activities on tertiary institutions was displayed in table 4.1. One of the consequences identified is the erosion of pupils' trust and belief in school. This discovery has significant implications for students, as it reveals that during strike actions, tertiary institutions experience a lack of determination and a weakening of their objectives. Therefore, the student's interest is diminished as the period is extended. In our materialistic world, students during such times often engage in alternative pursuits. This observation is supported by Emeyoun (2004), who observed that when higher education institutions are temporarily closed, students do not seem to exhibit any genuine sense of loss. The academic courses experienced a distortion and disturbance of the school calendar and academic activities, as indicated by the findings. During industrial action, such as strikes or protests, academic activities and other official jobs come to a halt as all operations are suspended while lecturers await resolutions. This disruption has a significant impact on the school calendar, causing delays in semester works and unnecessarily prolonging sessions. This discovery aligns with the observation made by Emeyonu (2004), where universities and higher institutions were closed for around six out of the nine months of the academic year. However, there was a pretense that the remaining three months would be sufficient to finish the year's workload. Additional findings indicate that there is a lack of consistency in academic curricula. The results also demonstrated a rise in examination malpractices and the prevalence of cultism among pupils. This is due to inadequate instruction provided to pupils, leading them to resort to unethical methods, including colluding with their teachers, in order to pass their exams. Similarly, due to the absence of academic responsibilities, students engage in numerous negative activities, such as cultism, to keep themselves engaged. A mind that is not occupied with productive activities might become a breeding ground for negative thoughts and actions. The outcome also demonstrated another consequence of the substandard caliber of graduates in comparison to other regions. The veracity of this discovery lies in the fact that our educational institutions have been accused of producing inadequately prepared graduates who are unable to substantiate and/or defend the qualifications they possess. This discovery aligns with a remark made by Emeyonu (2004), stating that the graduates of our colleges are, in general, no longer compatible with their peers worldwide. It is questionable how they can measure up to their counterparts in other nations in terms of character and education, considering that another study showed that the education system focuses heavily on cramming for exams and lacks a holistic approach to teaching and learning. Practical and laboratory activities are consistently excluded from the students' learning experiences. The prevalent focus on term papers and assignment submissions as a form of continuous evaluation has led to a tendency among students to rely on copying information from books rather than engaging in insightful and discovery-based learning. The analysis indicates a lack of dedication and disappointment among the staff members. This situation has

emerged because the staff members have become aware that their needs and desires are not being fulfilled within their institutions. As a result, some of them are starting to pursue other activities outside of their institutions in order to make ends meet. Denga (2008) argues that the conflicting relationship between labor and management has significantly diminished productivity. Additionally, it was discovered that there is a depletion of highly skilled personnel with intellectual capabilities from tertiary educational institutions. This issue develops due to the lack of conducive environments for serious academic pursuits in tertiary institutions. Additionally, it has been disclosed that there has been a decline in the quality of higher educational services. This is apparent in the quality of the teaching and non-teaching staff employed, since many highly qualified individuals have chosen to pursue opportunities in other countries. The strategies to eliminate strike actions are outlined in table 4.2. The findings suggest that improving administrative efficiency is a key strategy for eliminating industrial actions in tertiary institutions. Implicitly, individuals in administrative and managerial positions within these organizations should be aware of their responsibility in effectively managing staff-related matters and establishing a positive rapport. Additionally, it has been discovered that government intervention and advocacy for health strike relations serve as a means to eliminate strike activity. The government is the largest employer and has the authority to address workers on various matters before they escalate. This discovery aligns with Allen's (2005) perspective that government intervention in strike action is perceived as a strategy to control trade unions. It has been noted that the government is skilled at engaging in discourse and effectively determining the cost of maintaining industrial harmony through negotiations with the proper labor organization. Labour unions excel at dealing with government. It is necessary to regularly assess labor circumstances, including compensation scales, fringe benefits, and work conditions. According to Denga (2008), strike arbitration panels are an organizational arm responsible for implementing industrial actions. In order to eliminate strike actions in tertiary institutions, it was discovered that labor and management should conduct future negotiations based on the established laws and regulations governing labor issues. The violation of these principles, by any party, will exacerbate the strained relationship between labor and management. Each party should demonstrate a reciprocal relationship during the negotiation process. Denga (2008) suggests that collective bargaining should be defined by a receptive and adaptable mindset from both labor and management, taking into account the current economic, social, and political realities. Additionally, there should be unwavering trust between labor and management. The outcome also indicated the need for ongoing negotiation and dialogue. The reason for this is that the relationship between labor and management is a continuous occurrence, and what maintains this relationship is effective communication and discourse, both during times of conflict and times of harmony. Furthermore, it has been discovered that engaging in continuous negotiation or discourse is an effective strategy for eliminating strike actions. This discovery aligns with Allen's (2005) perspective that government intervention in strike relations is perceived as a strategy to control trade unions. Regularly reviewing the labor situation is necessary to assess the compensation scale, fringe benefits, work conditions, and other related factors.

## **Conclusion**

Strike action is an ongoing trend in tertiary institutions, and eradication measures could be painstaking, but possible, and when adopted, could bring about a relief in industrial peace and stability in tertiary institutions.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The autonomy of tertiary institutions should be promptly approved to prevent unwarranted government meddling in their internal matters. Similarly, it is necessary to reassess the standards and legal regulations for the selection of visitors for institutions. This will help prevent any indiscriminate labeling of government officials as visitors to these institutions, which could lead to mismanagement of staff-related matters.
- ii. The personnel and students of these institutions should be provided with a new direction, emphasizing their role as centers of education.
- iii. The government/management should promptly implement previous agreements on salary, fringe benefits, and other working conditions between labor and management in order to foster individual institutional peace.

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