



LAW AND INDUSTRIAL STRIKE ACTION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Industrial strike actions in Nigerian universities disrupt academic activities, impact students, and affect the overall quality of education. This discussion examines the law governing strike actions, common causes, challenges, and recommendations for managing disputes. Key issues include poor working conditions, salary disputes, and governance issues. Effective communication, dialogue, and conflict resolution mechanisms are crucial in preventing and resolving strike actions. By addressing these issues, Nigerian universities can promote a stable academic environment, benefiting students, staff, and society.

Keywords: Law; Industrial Strike Action; Nigerian Universities

Introduction

Industrial strike actions have become a recurring phenomenon in Nigerian universities, disrupting academic calendars, affecting the quality of education, and impacting the lives of students, lecturers, and support staff. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been at the forefront of these strikes, citing issues such as inadequate funding, poor working conditions, government interference in university affairs, and broader systemic problems plating Nigerian higher education. These strikes have far-reaching implications for students, who face delayed graduation and increased costs, lecturers, who experience work disruption and reputational impact, and the broader society, which suffers from a lack of skilled graduates, reduced research output, and decreased global competitiveness.

According to Ucheagwu-Okoye (2019), Eze (2023) and Anushiem and Anushiem (2025), the frequency and duration of these strikes raise important questions about the effectiveness of Nigeria's legal framework governing industrial actions, the role of government in university management, and the balance between academic freedom and national interests. As noted by Iloka, (2021) and Eze and Chukwuma (2023) and Anushiem (2026), Akpunonu, (2025) and Iloka, (2023) and Eze (2022), the Trade Disputes Act (2004) and Trade Union Amendment Act (2005) provide the regulatory framework for strikes, but their implementation, enforcement, and relevance in the current context are debated among stakeholders. This presentation will explore the complexities of industrial strike actions in Nigerian universities, examining causes, implications, and potential solutions that could foster a more stable and productive academic environment.



Legal Framework

1. Trade Union Act (2005): Regulates the right to strike and provides conditions for lawful strike actions.
2. Trade Disputes Act (2004): Establishes procedures for resolving trade disputes, including strike actions.
3. National Industrial Court Act (2006): Grants the National Industrial Court exclusive jurisdiction over labor disputes, including strike actions.
4. University Acts: Governs the establishment and management of universities, including staff rights and responsibilities.

Conditions for Lawful Strike Actions

1. Proper notice: Trade unions must give 15 days' notice to the employer and the Minister of Labor before embarking on a strike.
2. Exhaustion of dispute resolution mechanisms: Parties must have exhausted all other dispute resolution mechanisms, including negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.
3. Strike ballot: A majority of union members must vote in favor of the strike.
4. No essential services: Strike actions must not involve essential services, such as healthcare or security.

Causes of Industrial Strike Actions in Nigerian Universities

As discussed by Anushiem, Anushiem, Nwakoby and Ilodigwe (2025), Eze and Iloka (2022), Anushiem (2024) and Chukwuma (2025), industrial strike actions in Nigerian universities are often triggered by various factors, including:

- 1. Salary and benefits:** Disputes over salary increases, payment of allowances (e.g., sabbatical leave, research grants, academic staff union dues), and other benefits like health insurance, housing allowances, and pension schemes. These issues affect staff morale and motivation.
- 2. Poor working conditions:** Inadequate infrastructure (classrooms, labs, offices, libraries), lack of resources (books, equipment, internet, research funding), and poor working environments (safety, sanitation, ventilation). This hampers effective teaching, learning, and research.
- 3. Academic freedom:** Restrictions on academic freedom, autonomy in curriculum design, research direction, and expression of opinions. Staff may feel their academic rights are compromised.
- 4. Governance:** Disputes over university governance, including appointments (VCs, Deans, HODS), promotions, and decision-making processes. Transparency and fairness are often key concerns.
- 5. Funding:** Inadequate funding and budgetary allocations to universities, affecting operations, research, staff welfare, and infrastructure development. This impacts the quality of education and research output.
- 6. Staff welfare:** Issues related to staff welfare, including healthcare, housing, pensions, career development opportunities, and support for research and innovation.
- 7. Industrial relations:** Poor industrial relations between staff unions (ASUU, SSANU, NASU) and university management, often due to communication breakdowns, mistrust, or disagreements on policies.



8. Lack of dialogue: Failure to engage in meaningful dialogue and negotiation between parties, leading to unresolved issues and escalating tensions.

9. Unmet demands: Unmet demands and unresolved grievances leading to frustration and strike actions, sometimes spanning years. Staff may feel strikes are the only option left.

10. External factors: External factors like government policies (e.g., funding cuts, reforms), economic conditions (inflation, currency issues), and societal expectations impacting university operations and funding.

Consequences of Unlawful Strike Actions

Several authors such as Iloka, and Eze (2022), Chukwuma, (2020) and Iloka (2022), Akpunonu, (2019), Okechukwu (2025) and Ilodigwe (2026), Ucheagwu-Okoye (2025) and Akpunonu and Eze (2021) have discussed the consequences of industrial strikes. Most of them are highlighted hereunder.

- 1. Legal action:** Employers can seek court injunctions to stop unlawful strike actions.
- 2. Disciplinary action:** Participating employees may face disciplinary action, including termination.
- 3. Loss of pay:** Employees may lose pay for days not worked.
- 4. Damage to reputation:** Unlawful strike actions can damage the reputation of the university and its stakeholders.

Best Practices for Managing Strike Actions

- 1. Dialogue and negotiation:** Encourage open communication and negotiation between parties.
- 2. Adherence to procedures:** Follow established procedures for dispute resolution and strike actions.
- 3. Respect for the law:** Ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations.
- 4. Alternative dispute resolution:** Explore alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and arbitration.

Challenges of Industrial Strike Actions in Nigerian Universities

Authors such as Ucheagwu-Okoye (2021), Chukwuma (2025) and Anushiem (2025); Akpunonu, and Eze, (2022) and Eze, and Iloka (2022) have noted that industrial strike actions in Nigerian universities pose several challenges, including:

- 1. Disruption of academic activities:** Strike actions disrupt lectures, exams, and other academic activities, impacting students' learning outcomes.
- 2. Loss of productivity:** Strikes lead to loss of productivity, affecting research, teaching, and community service.
- 3. Damage to infrastructure:** Prolonged strikes can lead to damage to university infrastructure, including equipment and facilities.
- 4. Impact on students:** Strike actions affect students' academic progress, leading to delayed graduations and increased dropout rates.
- 5. Strained relationships:** Strikes can strain relationships between staff, management, and students, creating a toxic environment.



- 6. Financial implications:** Strike actions result in financial losses for universities, staff, and students.
- 7. Reputation:** Prolonged strikes can damage the reputation of Nigerian universities, affecting their global standing.
- 8. Difficulty in resolving disputes:** Resolving disputes and reaching agreements can be challenging, leading to prolonged strikes.
- 9. Impact on research:** Strike actions disrupt research activities, affecting academic publications and innovation.
- 10. Broader societal impact:** Strikes can have broader societal implications, affecting the economy and development.
- 11. Disruption of academic activities:** Strike actions disrupt lectures, exams, and other academic activities, impacting students' learning outcomes and academic progression. This can lead to rushed or compromised academic calendars.
- 12. Loss of productivity:** Strikes lead to loss of productivity, affecting research output, teaching, community service, and administrative tasks. This impacts the overall performance and rankings of universities.
- 13. Damage to infrastructure:** Prolonged strikes can lead to damage to university infrastructure, including equipment, facilities, and properties, due to neglect or lack of maintenance during the strike period.
- 14. Impact on students:** Strike actions affect students' academic progress, leading to delayed graduations, increased dropout rates, and uncertainty about their academic future. Students may also face financial losses due to extended stay in school.
- 15. Strained relationships:** Strikes can strain relationships between staff, management, and students, creating a toxic environment and affecting collaboration and academic discourse.
- 16. Financial implications:** Strike actions result in financial losses for universities (lost revenue, extra costs), staff (lost wages, allowances), and students (extended stay, repeated fees).
- 17. Reputation:** Prolonged strikes can damage the reputation of Nigerian universities, affecting their global standing, accreditation, and ability to attract students and partners.
- 18. Difficulty in resolving disputes:** Resolving disputes and reaching agreements can be challenging due to entrenched positions, communication breakdowns, or lack of trust between parties.
- 19. Impact on research:** Strike actions disrupt research activities, affecting academic publications, innovation, and contributions to knowledge. This impacts postgraduate students and research-dependent staff.
- 20. Broader societal impact:** Strikes can have broader societal implications, affecting the economy (e.g., delayed graduates entering workforce), development (e.g., skills gap), and public perception of education quality.

Solutions to Industrial Strike Actions in Nigerian Universities

- 1. Dialogue and negotiation:** Regular talks between management, unions, and government can prevent issues from escalating. For example, setting up joint committees for ongoing dialogue.
- 2. Establish clear grievance procedures:** Having clear steps for addressing grievances ensures staff concerns are heard and resolved quickly, reducing strike likelihood.



3. Increase funding: More funds can improve infrastructure, salaries, and research, addressing key strike triggers. Advocating for increased govt funding or exploring private partnerships could help.
- 4. Improve industrial relations:** Building trust through regular meetings and collaboration can prevent misunderstandings and disputes.
- 5. Alternative dispute resolution:** Mediation or arbitration can resolve disputes without strikes, saving time and resources.
- 6. Staff welfare packages:** Competitive salaries and benefits can reduce strike triggers, improving staff satisfaction and productivity.
- 7. Transparency and accountability:** Open decision-making processes build trust and reduce suspicions, making it harder for disputes to escalate.
- 8. Stakeholder engagement:** Involving students, parents, and the community fosters understanding and support for university challenges and solutions.

The Way Forwards

- 1. Establish effective communication channels:** Foster open communication between university management, staff unions, and students to prevent misunderstandings and resolve issues promptly.
- 2. Implement grievance resolution mechanisms:** Establish clear procedures for addressing grievances and resolving disputes before they escalate into strike actions.
- 3. Promote dialogue and negotiation:** Encourage regular dialogue and negotiation between parties to address issues and find mutually acceptable solutions.
- 4. Improve working conditions:** Address poor working conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of resources to reduce tensions.
- 5. Ensure timely payment of salaries and benefits:** Pay salaries and benefits on time to prevent disputes over financial issues.
- 6. Foster a culture of respect and trust:** Encourage a culture of respect, trust, and collaboration between university management, staff, and students.
- 7. Provide training on conflict resolution:** Offer training on conflict resolution, negotiation, and communication skills for university staff and management.
- 8. Encourage alternative dispute resolution:** Explore alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and arbitration, to resolve disputes without resorting to strike actions.
- 9. Strengthen staff unions:** Support staff unions in representing their members' interests and engaging in constructive dialogue with university management.
- 10. Monitor and evaluate:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms and make improvements as needed.

Conclusion

Industrial strike actions in Nigerian universities are complex issues with far-reaching consequences. Addressing the root causes, improving communication, and fostering a culture of respect and trust are crucial steps in reducing strike actions. By implementing effective conflict resolution mechanisms and promoting dialogue, Nigerian universities can minimize disruptions and create a more stable academic environment. This benefits students, staff, and the broader society, ultimately contributing to national development and growth.



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