

# Navigating Organizational Eddies and Currents Through The Lenses Of Industrial Relations In Nigerian Universities.

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## **Abstract**

*The study examined navigating organizational eddies and current through the lenses of industrial relations of Nigerian Universities. The study sought to determine alternative ways to handle industrial actions in Nigerian Universities. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 participants from the five federal universities in South-East, Nigeria. Data were generated through interviews and were analyzed manually using thematic analysis. The study revealed that honouring promises made or agreement reached, good negotiation skills, collective bargaining or collective agreement and mutual respect are alternatives to industrial action when strictly adhered to by the two parties. From the findings, it was recommended among others that ASUU and the federal government should explore collective bargaining mechanisms, using negotiation as a tool to find a workable solution that will not only be acceptable but achievable by all key stakeholders in the education sector thereby reducing constant strike currently seen in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Current, Eddies, Organization, industrial relations, Lenses, and Universities.

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## **I. Introduction**

Employment-related disputes have become part and parcel of our modern-day organizations. Confronting it diplomatically demands a good rapport between the employer and employee of labour, whether in the public or private sector. Employment-related disputes in recent times seem to be increasing in numbers, chiefly because of negligence on the part of the employer of labour in keeping to labour contracts with today's employee. The increasing number of unionization of civil servants of diverse backgrounds has also escalated the greater awareness of staff rights, coupled with the insincere attitude of some employers of labour in introducing changes without looking at the previously negotiated agreements and drawing the attention of well-established employment policies and rules have been some of the features of today's Organizations (Conference Proceedings of international labour Organization, 2014)

Organizational disputes have no doubt characterized industrial societies since the Industrial Revolution time. Disputes are an unavoidable part of organizational existence since the objective and mission of different stakeholders in an organization are at times not compatible. This is why industrial conflict is bound to exist. Its occurrence and re-occurrence, as in Nigeria, expresses the existence of the diseased relationship between the drivers of Nigerian organizations (Ogunbameru and Oribabor, 2000). Disputes in an organization could at times bring about loss of work, revenue, and also commitment. It becomes pertinent for stakeholders to work towards peaceful co-existence and harmony of employee and employer in the organization.

Industrial relations enable employers and employees to advocate, support, and fend for their welfare and also to reach a consensus in the best interest of the parties. Employers and employees might participate in the decision-making process on labor problems through their representatives, and play an active role in the development of a well-functioning industrial relations system. Most workplace concerns may be handled if employees, management, and employers cooperate rather than in confrontation. Multiple rules, as well as political, economic, labor, and social inputs, influence the institutions and practices that produce results in industrial relations systems. Wage-setting agreements, employment connections, and other intangible assets like trust, mutual recognition, cooperative schemes, and social and industrial harmony are examples of these results (The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), 2016).

Nigerian employees have severally witnessed a great number of incessant industrial actions and this is a reflection of insincerity on the part of employers towards their employees in the Nigerian labour market (Oriyomi, et al, 2016). Industrial relations could not be achieved when the employer, management, and

employee are working in isolation from one another. The greatest concern of industrial relations in any workplace is the peaceful relationship that exists between the employee and employer in the place of work which is calculated to bring about industrial harmony and increase in production. The employment relationship is necessary for the peace and harmony of every organization. But the insincerity of people involved is making it difficult for the employment relationship to be achieved ( Oriyomi, et al, 2016). This is primarily due to the volatile nature of the Nigerian economy, which was assumed to be anti-employee due to what employees receive in salaries when compared to what their counterparts in other countries receive, and also due to the continuous decline of the Nigerian currency against the dollar, which has often resulted in employees pressuring management or employers to offer better working conditions and welfare provisions without compensation (Onasanya, 1999). On the other side, the employer will attempt to cut costs and will do all in his power to urge the unions not to demand a higher quality of living, which may lead to industrial confrontation.

It will not be out of place to put that, no labour disputes have ended without coming to the round table for amicable resolution by the parties involved. Employer-employee relations are vital in labour relations due to their significant role in conflict management, thereby constituting benign employer-employee relationships.

This study is narrowed down to the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which has over the years faced with series of industrial disputes that is increasingly gaining recognition in the educational sector of the Nigerian nation; and this phenomenon has attracted the condemnation of well-meaning Nigerians and education stakeholders (Adavbiele, 2015). Two major types of conflicts exist in Nigerian organizations, and Nigerian universities are not exempted. Internal and external conflicts are present. Employees and management have internal conflict, whereas employees and other bodies such as the government have external conflict. Internal disputes between university administration and its staff abound, while exterior confrontations arise between the unions, the federal and state governments. External disputes appear to be the most prevalent type of crisis at Nigerian colleges, and they occur at worrisome rates due to the wide range of parties engaged (Ojo, 2020). Because of man's political nature and the fact that conflict is a worldwide phenomenon in organizations, its existence, and reoccurrence in Nigerian institutions is unavoidable (Abolo and Oguntoye,n.d) In today's Nigeria, it has become the norm for Nigerian universities to go through an entire academic session without being disrupted by some form of dispute, whether external (external) or internal (internal), which has resulted in a series of strike actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The union has used a variety of industrial measures, like strikes, to ensure that the government pays attention to the problems plaguing Nigeria's university system.

However, the incessant strike action which remains the only weapon ASUU has got to force down their demands has seemed to have proved abortive in dealing with issues confronting the union, as the fundamental issues that top the demand of ASUU persist, and it equally has a strong negative impact on both the academic performances of students and the economy of Nigerian at large. This frequent strike action has also provided a fertile ground for university students to engage in all forms of criminal and immoral activities while the union is on strike. Inadequate implementation of the curriculum is left for posterity to judge, and a time bomb awaiting explosion. The strike actions embarked thus far by the union only contributed in a little measure in solving the problem confronting the union. The federal government on the other hand seems to be adamant in bringing a lasting solution to the problems bedeviling the union, despite the union has embarked on a series of industrial actions, which they calculated to be their last resort, and equally helped give all issues projected by the union a decent and perpetual burial. Unresolved issues between the government (federal and state) and Nigerian universities seemed to have given rise to serious consequences on staff performance such as low morale, reduced productivity, delayed academic calendar, and extension of academic programs. Because of this, the study seeks to determine the alternative way of showing off industrial grievances other than through industrial actions that will be fair for the Federal government and ASUU.

## **II. Conceptual And Theoretical Issues**

### **Industrial Relations**

The term Industrial Relations (IR) is coined from two words- industry and relations. The industry can be seen as any productive activity in which a person or a group of persons are involved, whereas Relations refers to the employer-employee connections that occur within the industry. The word "industrial relations" refers to the entire field of connection that develops as a result of men and women's willingness to cooperate in today's workplace. In an industrial environment, industrial relations are simply an "Employment Relationship." It includes all of the government's laws, rules, regulations, agreements, and judicial awards, as well as conventions and traditions. As a result, IR entails an examination of working circumstances, job security, social conflict, cultural relations, and legal elements of legal conflicts. The interaction between employers and employees for controlling work relations is referred to as industrial relations. It won't be out of place if it's summed up as an area of practice marked by industrial disputes and industrial politics.

For the parties concerned in industrial relations, the term "effectiveness" encompasses a wide range of meanings. For the employer, effectiveness involves the capacity to exert complete control over workplace interactions; the employer chooses, and the employees obey; or, if the employees disagree, they must follow the employer's system for expressing and resolving their differences. The parties to an employment relationship cannot be regarded to be in balance unless they are judiciously carrying out their obligations in the manner that is thought proper (Muideen & Raji, 2016).

The presence of a symbiotic job connection instills in both employees and employers the ability to make similar statements to organizations. Workers have less weariness in their employment, are more devoted to their employers, and are more compelled to accomplish their duties properly when there are positive and excellent connections between the employee, the employer, and the management (Galinsky, 1993 as cited in Muideen & Raji, 2016). When an employee sees a benign and work-friendly workplace and there are equal chances of advancement by all and sundry without minding your race, colour, and gender, the worker is more committed and ready to put his best whenever it is needed. Industrial relations are not only essential for workplace harmony but highly crucial for the country and organization's development.

### **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS EDDIES AND CURRENTS**

Eddies are tiny, temporary spinning water loops that may travel considerable distances before dissipating. Eddies are tiny pockets of flowing water that break out from the main body of a current and travel separately from their parent. Their formation is the outcome of an instability process in which large-scale mean flows continually break down into smaller size characteristics. Ocean eddies are comparable to atmospheric weather, but due to the contrasts between air and water, their geographical sizes are smaller and their temporal durations are longer.

Currents are constant tributaries of water stirring over the ocean, and they encompass long-term phenomena like the Gulf Torrent with episodic waves in both coastal and open areas. Wind sweeps across the ocean's surface, which changes the water temperature, density, and pressure. These are led by the earth's rotation, as well as the positioning of continents and ocean bottom topography.

Strong currents and eddies have been known to damage oil rigs and have an impact on shipping routes. Beach erosion and the migration of barrier islands are influenced by strong offshore currents and weaker coastal currents.

Eddies and Currents as used in this article means all forms of industrial conflicts that have the capacity of jeopardizing organizational peace and harmony. Organizational conflict is an internal misunderstanding that occurs between employee and employer and among employees. These misunderstandings could bring about discord and loss of manpower, profit, etc. in the organization. When there is an unsettled dispute among the employees or between the employer and the employee, it could harm the achievement of the company's objectives. As an employer, navigating through organizational eddies and currents need strong conflict resolution skills and the managerial ability to diffuse tense atmosphere and help employees get along with one another.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT**

The organizational conflict has been variously defined by different scholars from their viewpoints. The commonest among all these definitions is that conflict is a perception, which begins whenever an individual feels that one's action or inaction will affect him or her interest negatively either as an individual or a group (Boateng, 2014). But because of the huge gap arising from cultural, ethical, educational, and societal diversity among employees of an organization, the absence of conflict usually shows zero tolerance to meaningful interaction amongst the people. There are three contrasting opinions on the conflict that have been developed over time, which include interactionism, ascent (the belief that conflict is tumultuous and should be avoided at all courses), and determination-centered views (Anoke, Ositya, Eze, & Muogbo, 2012).

Our current organization is riven by disputes as a result of a lack of freedom, positions, and resources, communication and leadership issues, and personality, attitudes, thoughts, and orientation variations amongst or among personnel (Saranya, 2016). Organizational conflict is present in almost all of today's firms, and it manifests itself in a variety of ways, such as minimum wages, competition for jobs, greed, interpersonal disputes, and industrial activities (Mughal & Khan, 2013). Organizational conflict occurs when the purported requirements, aims, interests, and values of the many persons in the organization do not align, resulting in dissatisfaction as each of them strives to achieve the organization's goals (Longe) (2015). Organizational disputes are inevitable, especially because today's organizations are made up of varied entities, and daily interactions with others can lead to differences and conflict (Awan & Saeed, 2015). Thus, workplace conflict is frequent and will always exist, especially because of rivalry for security, employer and employee insincerity, recognition, authority, and leadership squabbles (Olang, 2017).

Nigerian Universities are not exempted from any forms of organizational conflict because of various unions that are made up of the university internal environment. Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU), National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT), and Academic Staff Union of Universities are examples of such organizations (ASUU). These unions are expected to work together with university administration and university owners to reconstruct the system to fulfill the primary aims that the institutions were founded on. This has not been the case, since unions have been involved in industrial disputes (strikes) with their particular university administrations, federal and state governments at various periods over concerns that should have been addressed amicably and harmoniously. The federal government has appointed a delegation to engage with university-based unions to restore lasting peace in the system due to the ASUU's ongoing industrial crisis in Nigerian institutions. The ministry of labor and the National Universities Commission (NUC), as the regulating body, are always important in ensuring that collective bargaining between the federal government and university-based unions runs smoothly. Most university strikes have been motivated by increasing university funding and the federal government's and ASUU's failure to follow 2009 collective bargaining agreements.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The research is based on the Human Needs Theory. David Gil has been the only well-known proponent of this hypothesis in recent years. Human needs theory takes a perspective akin to Frustration-Aggression and Relative Deprivation theory. Its primary premise is that people have basic human wants that they attempt to meet and that other people's or the government's unwillingness to provide these needs can have an immediate or delayed effect, leading to conflict (Rosati et al. 1990). In this context, "basic human needs" include physical, psychological, and economic demands. To grant access to one (e.g. wage) while denying access to the other (e.g. security, earned allowances, entitlement, promotion, etc.) is tantamount to denial, and it may lead to industrial conflict in an attempt to have their voices heard by the government and employers. As a result of the dissatisfaction with these requirements, workers' potentials are not realized, resulting in conflict (Chris, 2014). The relationship between this study and theory is the drive for the fulfillment of human wants, as well as the dissatisfaction that comes with deprivation.

### **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Chile and Ogbu (2021) examined Advancing the Use of Strategic Communication in Collective Bargaining and Labour Relations in Nigeria: A Study of ASUU and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). The study considered the ASUU related issues on collective bargains and labour relations in Nigeria, while the study found that employers of labour (government) have always breached collective bargaining and agreement with labour unions as the case with ASUU. The findings of the study also show that employers do not respect labour laws even though this is tantamount to abuse of human rights. This study argues that labour unions adopt more agitation mechanism that allows for employees to demand their rights while employers are usually not interested in the welfare of the labour unions in Nigeria. Employers also contend that employees' zeal for incessant demand for increased pay may not be easily allowed since labour unions can complicate the running of government with incessant strikes. This study, therefore, contends that effective application of strategic communication by employers (government) will surely enhance respect for collective bargaining and agreement with all Nigeria labour unions. This, if done by employers, will help in no small measure to end the incessant industrial strikes in Nigeria.

Ojo (2020) investigated the collective bargaining process and agreement implementation: An analysis of the FG/ASUU labor conflicts. The study aims at investigating how collective bargaining has affected the implementation of agreements reached in settling industrial disagreements, between the two key players (ASUU and FGN). The study revealed that capital acquisition at the expense of labor, absence of political will and untruthfulness on the part of the federal government, systemic corruption, and government leaders' ignorance of the cost of running the university system has hampered the execution of the agreements achieved. As a result, it believes that poor collective bargaining, inability to honor agreements, and failure to execute agreements were major factors in the industrial dispute. The article suggests that regulations regulating the university system be the result of careful debate so that collective agreements may be formed to provide viable solutions that adhere to accepted international norms.

Amadi and Urho (2015) studied the impact of industrial actions on the university educational system in Rivers State, Nigeria. 75 and 60 non-academic and academic staff respectively was randomly picked for the study. A questionnaire and interview were used as means of data collection instruments. Data were analyzed with regression. It revealed that academic programs are normally disrupted by incessant strike action. The study recommended that industrial dispute can be minimized to the barest minimum in Rivers State University through stifling various aspects of collective bargaining mechanism; all parties should permit and obey the third party in negotiations resolution. The study equally proposed that agreements reached earlier on salaries,

perquisite and alternative operating conditions between labour and management government ought to be revered and reviewed as at when due.

Nala (2014) examined South Africa's Strike Prevention Strategies for Nurses in Public Institutions. To accomplish this, the study aims at reviewing the variables for nurses' engagement in strikes and their effect. The study adopted descriptive and analytic. A total of 80 professional nurses were involved in the research, with 53 not participating in strike action and 27 participating in strike action. The survey also included a sample of eleven nurse managers to examine their perspectives on nurse strikes and their grasp of the changing work environment. A total of 40 healthcare consumers were involved in the study to estimate the overall impact of the nurses' strike. It was revealed that there are many reasons for strike action in the public-health sector depending on the place or nation, salary is by far the most often claimed cause

### **III. Materials And Methods**

#### **Participants**

Ten lecturers (six male and four female) were purposively selected from the five federal universities in South-East Nigeria. Two from each university. Only five (5) Federal Universities are in southeast Nigeria.

#### **Criteria for Selection**

The selected participants are ASUU members of the senior lecturer cadre and above who have witnessed, experienced, and participated in a series of industrial actions and are willing to participate in the study

#### **Material and procedure**

The instrument was a four-question unstructured interview schedule designed to answer the study questions. Some of the questions were designed to elicit a description of their sentiments regarding the ongoing strikes. The researchers collaborated on the questions. The study team included lecturers from the Department of Business Administration who had extensive expertise doing qualitative research.

#### **IV. Data analysis**

The data were directly transcribed. We reflected on the respondents' narratives by doing repeated readings of both individual transcripts and the entire interview as a unified text, by phenomenology in qualitative research design, to make sense of their shared experiences and perceptions.

#### **Thematic Categories**

Four themes emerged after transcription, as proposed by Cresswell (2013). These thematic categories were then utilized in arranging the information into an MS Word Excel spreadsheet. Themes were argued upon and agreed upon by the researcher depending on the evidence available. This validated the study because it made it difficult for any single author to influence the interpretation of the result.

### **IV. Results**

Four main themes emerged from the study.

#### **Honoring Promises or Agreements**

On the issue of honouring promises or agreements as an alternative to striking, the majority of the participants agreed that the government must keep to the promises or agreements made to decrease strike action in Nigerian universities.

Incessant strike actions by Nigerian Universities are predominantly caused by the failure of the federal government to honour the agreement with ASUU. **(Participant B male, Federal University of Owerri; FUTO)**

Insincerity on the part of the federal government in keeping to their promises is the chief proponent of industrial actions in Nigerian Universities. Once they become sincere in keeping to their promises by saying what they mean and mean what they say, it will help in curbing incessant strike actions in our Universities. **(Participant D, Female, Alex Ekwueme, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo University, Ebonyi State)**

Deceit and corruption has caused the federal government not to honour the agreement entered into with ASUU **(Participant A, Male, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka)**

Lack of continuity on the part of the government has led to incessant strike actions in our universities. Whenever a new government comes into power, it will jettison the agreement the previous administration had with ASUU and this will not go down well with ASUU. **(Participant E Male University of Nigeria Nsukka)**

#### **Good Negotiation Skills**

A majority of participants said that stakeholders in labor relations should have to negotiate skills to successfully bargain or dialogue during the negotiation process and prevent strike action.

Most times, government representatives often refuse to appear for negotiation which would have been an avenue to address the issues that normally leads to strikes and this has contributed to stretching the elasticity of the negotiation period. **(Participant C, Female Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike).**

Trained experts with good negotiation skills from both parties will form part of the delegates to ensure that the key areas are discussed during negotiation while non-key areas will be discarded to ensure quick resolution. **(Participant F, Male Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka).**

#### **Collective Bargaining or Collective Agreements**

Participants agreed that mutual agreement /collective bargaining is an alternative to strikes in industrial disputes because it helps both parties to reach a voluntary agreement on the matter at hand.

Consensus on the part of ASUU and the federal government concerning the most pressing needs will help in reducing incessant industrial actions in Nigerian Universities. **(Participant J Male University of Nigeria Nsukka)**

The two parties need to conclude the yet-to-be-implemented areas in the previous agreement to enable them to come up with a working plan that will favour both ASUU and the Federal government. **(Participant G Female, Federal University of Owerri FUTO)**

#### **Mutual Respect**

The participants revealed that mutual respect among the parties is pivotal in navigating industrial disputes in Nigerian public universities.

You know that two (The federal government and ASUU) cannot work together unless they agree. Most often, either or both parties do not respect each other putting in mind that every problem has a solution and can be solved at a round table. If the two parties will have mutual understanding and respect for each other frequent strike action in Nigeria will be a thing of the past **(Participant D, Male, Alex Ekwueme, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo University, Ebonyi State)**

#### **Discussion of Result**

##### **Honouring Promises or Agreement**

The study found that the inability of the federal government to keep to their promises or agreement contributes to the frequent industrial action that is been experienced in Nigerian Universities. This finding aligns with the findings of Ojo (2020) who contends that deficient collective bargaining, lack of honouring the agreement, and failure to execute agreements were major factors in the industrial dispute

##### **Good Negotiation Skills**

On the issue of good negotiation skills between ASUU and FGN, the study revealed that good negotiation skills are vital in tackling organizational disputes issues in Nigerian universities. This finding aligns with the findings of Amadi and Urho (2015) who assert that industrial dispute can be minimized to the barest minimum in Rivers State University through stifling various aspects of the collective bargaining mechanism; all parties should permit and obey the third party in negotiations resolution.

##### **Collective Bargaining or Collective Agreements**

It was evident that collective bargaining and mutual agreement are better alternatives to industrial action. This implies that a good collective negotiating process helps prevent industrial action within an organization through unified understanding. The study is in tandem with the findings of Chile and Ogbu (2021) who maintained that employers of labour (government) have always breached collective bargaining and agreement with labour unions as the case with ASUU.

##### **Mutual Respect**

The study revealed that mutual respect among the interested parties is one of the key strategies of solving industrial-related matters action in Nigeria universities. This finding correlates with the findings of Chile and Ogbu (2021) who postulate that employers do not respect labour laws even though this is tantamount to abuse of human rights.

## **V. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study investigates alternatives to strike actions in Nigerian Universities with the respondents drawn from the five (5) federal universities in South-East Nigeria. From the survey, it is evident that when these steps such as Honouring Agreement, Good Negotiation Skills, Collective Bargaining, and Mutual Respect are taken more seriously by the two parties, it will ameliorate the incessant strike actions in the Nigerian Universities.

From the findings, the study proposed that government needs to honour and fulfill the agreement reached to reduce constant industrial disputes in the Nigerian universities.

Parties involved in industrial action should acquire good negotiation skills to enable them to bargain and dialogue efficiently and effectively during the round table negotiation process as this will limit or minimize the unproductive strike action.

ASUU and FGN) need to strengthen collective bargaining mechanisms as a tool against industrial disputes since it prevents unnecessary strike action.

The key stakeholders in industrial disputes need to respect each other's interests, opinions, and views to minimize incessant industrial actions bedeviling the Nigerian educational system.

### **Limitation**

The study is limited to five (5) Federal Universities in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. It is expected that another study should cover 49 federal universities in Nigeria to validate this study. Some information is considered and classified as confidential by the respondents and needed direct approval from the union (ASUU) to dish such out. However, this was surmounted through the help of the union executive.

### **Acknowledgment**

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