



COPING STRATEGIES AMONG MEMBERS OF ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) DURING THE 2022 STRIKE: A STUDY OF NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY AWKA

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Abstract

Strikes among members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria have become a complex and reoccurring social problems with debilitating socio-economic and livelihood consequences. Notwithstanding this, studies have neglected the issue of survival as well as how union members coped during these strikes periods. This study therefore examined the coping strategies employed by ASUU members during the 2022 strike in line with the no-work-no-pay policy by the government using Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State as a point of reference. Conflict theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. The study adopted the mixed methods research design, using the multistage sampling procedure in the selection of 400 respondents. The structured questionnaire and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide served as instruments for data collection. The quantitative data was coded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Frequency tables and charts were used to present, describe and analyze the data, while the qualitative data was analyzed using manual content analysis. One research hypothesis was formulated and tested using chi-square inferential statistics. The findings of the study reveal that ASUU members ventured into alternative sources of income; and for many of them, business provided an alternative source of income. Based on the findings of the study, the work recommended that conflict resolution specialists should be consulted to mediate between ASUU and the government by playing conciliatory role in settling trade disputes in other to save the soul of university education in Nigeria and prevent further occurrence of strikes.

Keywords: ASUU, Coping Strategy, Trade Union, No-work-no-pay, Strike.

Introduction

Work organizations have witnessed strikes embarked upon by employees (Osunkwo & Anigolu 2020). Since the industrial revolution, these strikes are manifestations of complaints, grievances and disputes that are not resolved within the grievance settlement machinery. In the workplace, employees are daily confronted with different aspect of trade disputes that affect their work behavior in several ways. Strikes, usually are declared as a last resort and have tremendous impact on employee performance as working days, and millions of man hours are lost depending on duration of the strike and numbers of workers involved (Nnonyelu, 2021). Nigeria education sector, particularly tertiary education, most especially the university system has been the epicenter of strikes, with the Academic Staff Union of Universities its most vocal participant (Nnonyelu, 2002; Akinbode, 2019). Very recently, from 2016 to 2022, ASUU embarked upon 667 days of strike (Nwanyawu, Nkoro, Nwankwo & Igbara 2023), which involved 37,504 academic staff in Nigeria public universities (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021).

Even though strikes have some positive effects in the society like increase in salary, improvement in the working conditions and general welfare of workers, it also has negatively affected production and development desired by the Nigerian economy (Uzoh, 2021). Academic Staff Union of the University (ASUU) evolved from the remains of the Nigerian



Association of University Teachers (NAUT) established in 1965. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) gained autonomy in 1978 and started to function as a union that defends the right of her members (Monogbe & Monogbe 2019). ASUU is a union of intellectuals from federal and state owned universities in Nigeria seeking for the protection of their interest and economic welfare of her members and the country in general. ASUU is seen by some commentators as one of the strongest and reliable trade unions in Nigeria (Okeke, Anierobi, & Ezennaka, 2021).

However, in Nigeria, studies have shown that whenever workers are demanding or agitating for certain entitlements or changes, they usually embark on strike (Adewuyi, 2020). Given the breach of internal grievances settlement mechanism, the use of strike is regarded as the final option in the arsenal of labour unions in resolving disputes at the workplace, it is a simultaneous cessation of work by workers or employees temporarily in order to express grievance or to enforce a demand concerning changes in work conditions. (Uzoh, 2021). The prevalence of strike in Nigeria led Nnonyelu (2002) to affirm that Nigerian universities are at cross roads, as universities could no longer be distinguished as citadel of learning but centers for conflict. The recent February 14, 2022 strike action embarked by the academic staff and was the most challenging strike action, which lasted for eight months without both parties, (The government and ASUU) coming to a compromise, rather the federal government made the situation unbearable for the academic staff by enacting a no-work-no-pay policy (Onwuka, Nwokolo & Achebe 2022). The issue of survival when the salary is stopped in line with the federal government directive of no-work-no-pay necessitates the academic staff to search for other alternatives source of income in other to stay afloat and carter for their welfare (Bawalle, 2020). Common sense implies that academic staff with immediate family tend to have household needs and obligation to meet unlike the single academic staff (Okah, Iyiani & Aghedo, 2022), some married academic staff especially the female staff may get support from their spouse, in that their spouse are likely to be responsible enough to serve as a significant support, “a shock absorber”, in the times of financial stress brought on by strike and government failure to pay salary. However, the situation may likely be more challenging when both partners are working in public university (Bawalla, 2020).

Onwuka, Nwokolo and Achebe (2022) in their study, submits that majority of the academic staff tend to engage in agricultural activities, while some may rely on loans from friends and cooperative groups. Others may choose to reduce their daily spending by prioritizing only their essential needs and forgoing other household expenses, such as cable TV subscription. In other to lessen the difficulty brought on by financial pressure during strike, some may likely venture into petty business, while others may go into menial jobs.

Olaleru (2022) opined that not all academic staff are likely to be affected in the same way by the strike and the seizure of salary by the government. For those whose spouses are not working in public universities, whose children may have grown up and already working, those who may have access to loans in cooperative societies and those who are already moonlighters that tend not to rely on the government salary alone, the hardship may seem bearable. For those who may not belong to any of this category, the situation may likely be challenging for them (Bawalla, 2020). However, the academic staff remains persistent in their quest for improved welfare. This perseverance has probably supported by an avalanche of coping strategies (Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2014). Currently, there is a dearth of research on the academic staff living condition/coping strategies, the extent to which union members coped with the federal government no-work-no-pay policy during the 2022 strike still remains unclear to an extent



and requires empirical research. It is therefore imperative to study the categories of academic staff that utilize the different coping strategies and those that are more vulnerable. It is in this context that this study is undertaken with a view to understand the coping strategies by ASUU members of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Research Question

What were the types of coping strategies employed by members of ASUU in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka during the 2022 strike?

Research Objective

To find out the coping strategies employed by ASUU members of Nnamdi Azikiwe University during 2022 strike.

Research Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between duration of service and need for coping assistance during strike among ASUU NAU members.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict theory has been adopted as the theoretical thrust of this work. The Conflict theory is a macro-oriented paradigm which is based on the ideas of Lewis Coser, Karl Marx, Ralph Darendorf amongst others in the 19-20th century. The general assumption of the conflict theory posits that society is characterized by various inequalities and class conflict that arise due to differences in power, resources and social status. It emphasizes the competition between groups, often framing issues in terms of dominance and subordination. Conflict theory also challenges the status quo and highlights social change driven by these conflicts.

The Karl-Max-Marxist approach to conflict is based on the notion that the economic activities are majorly controlled by capitalists whose only objective is to maximize their profit and exploit the workers by trying to purchase labour at the lowest possible price, the wage worker on the other hand, tries to sell his only asset at the highest possible price in order to ensure his existence. It also emphasizes the competition between groups, often framing issues in terms of dominance and subordination.

The Conflict theory is deemed more appropriate for this work because it captures a range of factors that influence the decision of the academic union members to engage in strike action which necessitates a coping strategy amidst the strike. Conflict theory is relevant and found very useful in explaining and analyzing the realities in Nigeria's educational system. According to this theory, conflict arises when workers feel deprived of what they perceive are their fair entitlement which produce a far reaching consequence on their job. When the ASUU members in Nigerian universities are not paid enough to cater for themselves and their families and the state who wields political power of control does little or nothing to improve their condition. It therefore, stressed on the relevance of collective action involving strike which is radical in nature as the only significant way the government responds quick, which remains the reason for the incessant use of strike action among the academic staff in Nigeria universities.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted the mixed methods research design. The method involves the synergy of quantitative and qualitative approach in data collection and presentation. This study takes place in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The study population of this research work comprised



all the ASUU members of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. According to data from ASUU secretariat the total numbers of ASUU members in NAU as at 2024 is (2,163). A sample size of 485 was determined using the Taro Yamani (1967) Formula. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed for this study to get the respondents. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the participants for the in-depth interview, based on their knowledge of the theme of the study. 8 participants were selected for the In-Depth Interview (IDI). A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data, while the In-Depth Interview (IDI) was used to collect the qualitative data. A uniform set of questionnaires were administered to all the respondents. The researchers got approval from the respondents before administering the questionnaires.

The data collected through questionnaire was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages and graphic illustrations were used in presenting, describing and analyzing the quantitative data. The formulated hypothesis was tested using the chi-square (χ^2) inferential statistics. On the other hand, the qualitative data collected through IDI was analyzed using the content analysis by interpreting and coding textual materials, in doing this, documents, oral communications and graphics were systematically evaluated to complement the quantitative data of the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

485 copies of questionnaire were administered by the researcher. Only 383 (95.75%) of the questionnaires were correctly filled and returned. The analysis for this study was consequently done with the 383 correctly filled questionnaires.

Socio-demographic Data of Respondents

This section deals with the socio-demographic data of respondents such as, gender, marital status, ranks, religious affiliation, income, amongst others as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by their socio-demographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percent
GENDER		
Male	148	38.6
Female	235	61.4
Total	383	100
MARITAL STATUS		
Single		
Married	64	16.7
Divorced/Separated	299	78.1
Widowed	5	1.3
Total	15	3.9
RELIGION	383	100
African Traditional Religion		
Christianity	13	3.4
Islam	361	94.3
Atheism	7	1.8
Total	2	0.5
RANK	383	100
Graduate Assistant		
Assistant Lecturer	10	2.6
Lecturer II	186	48.6
Lecturer I	50	13.1
Senior Lecturer	30	7.8



Reader	87	22.7
Professor	15	3.9
Total	5	1.3
MONTHLY INCOME (in Naira)	383	100
101,000 – 150,000		
151,000 – 200,000	211	55.1
201,000 –250,000	65	17.0
251,000 – 300, 000	39	10.2
351,000 – 400,000	48	12.5
Above 400,000	15	3.9
Total	5	1.3
DURATION OF SERVICE	383	100
Less than 1 year		
1-5 years	10	2.6
6-10 years	227	59.3
11-15 years	25	6.5
Above 15 years	24	6.3
Total	97	25.3
OTHER SOURCES OF LIVELIHOOD	383	100
Yes		
No		
Total	173	45.2
	210	54.8
	383	100

Field Survey, 2024.

Table 1 show that 38.6% of the respondents are male, while 61.4% of the respondents are Female. 78.1% of the respondents are married while 16.7% of the respondents are Single. 1.3% of the respondents are Divorced/Separated while 3.9% of the respondents are widowed. 94.3% of the respondents are Christians, while 0.5% of the respondents are Atheists. 3.4% of the respondents are ATR while 1.8% of the respondents are Islam.

In terms of rank: 2.6% of the respondents are Graduate Assistance while 48.6% of the respondents are Assistant Lecturers. 13.1% of the respondents are Lecturer 2 while 7.8% of the respondents are Lecturer 1. 22.7% of the respondents are Senior Lecturers, 3.9% of the respondents are Readers while 1.3% of the respondents are professors.

55.1% of the respondents earn #101,000 – #150,000 monthly while 17.0% of the respondents earn #151,000-#200,000 monthly. 10.2% of the respondents earn #201,000-#250,000 monthly while 12.5% of the respondents earn #251,000-300,000. 3.9% of the respondents earn #351,000-#400,000 monthly while 1.3% earns 400,000 and above monthly.

In terms of duration of service, 2.6% of the respondents have been in service in less than one year, while 59.3% of the respondents have been in service between 1-5 years. 6.5% of the respondents have been in service between 6-10 years, 6.3% of the respondents have been in service between 11-15 years, while 25.3% of the respondents have been in service for 15 years and above. 45.2% of the respondents have other sources of livelihood, while 54.8% of the respondents do not have other sources of livelihood.

Analysis of Research Question

This section deals with the analysis of the research question.

Question: What were the types of coping strategies employed by members of ASUU in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka during the 2022 strike? The findings are presented in table 2 below:



Table 2: Responses on which coping strategy was adopted

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Farming	128	33.4
Business	166	43.3
Consultancy services	39	10.2
Research	25	6.5
Transportation	10	2.6
Other	15	3.9
Total	383	100.0

Field Survey, 2024.

Table 2 reveals that 43.3% of the respondents stated that they went into business, while 3.9% stated that they went into other ventures such as tailoring, painting, printing and the rest.

According to an IDI participant:

Some ASUU members were engaged in private business; some of them went into farming, especially those who bought lands. Personally, there is a private university where I teach, and I also taught secondary school students chemistry. So that was how I was able to cope with the no-work-no-pay policy during the 2022 strike (Female, 50 years, Professor).

According to another IDI participant:

I went into farming and poultry. Well, not really because of the strike because I was already into agriculture before the strike. Just that the strike enabled me to pay full attention to my enterprise. I cultivated cucumber, cassava, maize, potatoes and vegetables. It was a really trying period for me and my family, but thank God we pulled through that difficult period. One good thing the strike did for me was that it helped me expand my agro business. I was able to carve a niche for myself in terms of marketing my products, and till today, I have a ready market for my business (Male, 39 years, Senior Lecturer).

The respondents were also asked if the coping strategies were effective in curtailing the economic hardship caused by the No-work-no-pay policy of the government. Their responses are captured in figure 1 below:

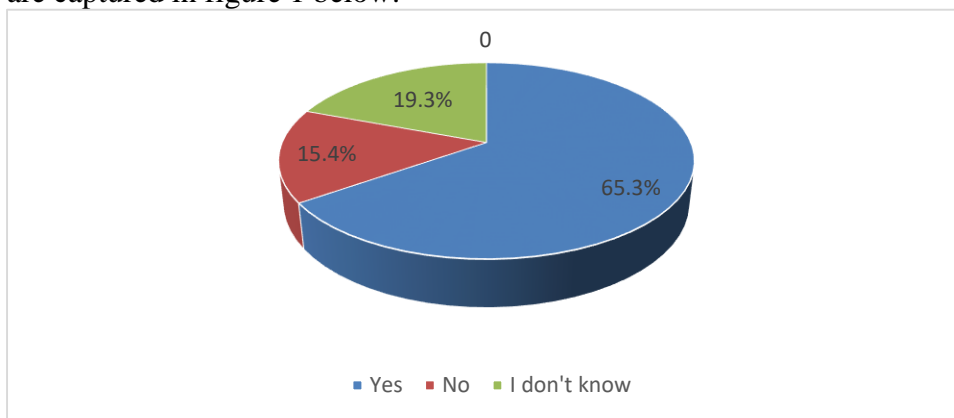


Figure 1: Responses on if the coping strategies were effective in curtailing the economic hardship caused by the no-work-no-pay policy of the federal government
Field survey, 2024



Figure 1 reveals that 65.3% of the respondents opined that the coping strategies were effective in curtailing the economic hardship caused by the no-work-no-pay policy of the federal government, while 15.4% of the respondents disagreed. According to an IDI participant:

Well, at least my business was able to put food on my table. I would not categorically state that it was effective or ineffective, but it at least helped us cope with the little expenses we incur daily. The reality of the no-work-no-pay policy of the federal government was a very harsh and hard one. You know? You just wake up and all of a sudden the government decides to stop you salary. It was a very harsh experience (Male, 45 years, Reader).

Test of Hypothesis

In this section, the hypothesis formulated to guide this study was tested using chi-square inferential statistics.

There is a significant relationship between duration of service and need for coping assistance among ASUU NAU members during the 2022 strike.

The relationship between duration of service and need for coping assistance during strike among ASUU NAU members

		Did you require any coping assistance during the strike?		Total	
		Yes	No		
How long have you been working here?	Less than 1 year	Count	10	0	10
		Expected Count	4.4	5.6	10.0
	1-5 years	Count	99	128	227
		Expected Count	99.6	127.4	227.0
	6-10 years	Count	20	5	25
		Expected Count	11.0	14.0	25.0
	11-15 years	Count	0	24	24
		Expected Count	10.5	13.5	24.0
	Above 15 years	Count	39	58	97
		Expected Count	42.5	54.5	97.0
Total		Count	168	215	383
		Expected Count	168.0	215.0	383.0

$X^2=45.342$, $DF=4$, $P\text{-Value}=0.000$

Field survey, 2024

The P-value of $0.000 \leq 0.05$ (which is the level of significance), we therefore accept the substantive hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is a significant relationship between duration of service and need for coping assistance among ASUU NAU members during 2022 strike.



Discussion of Findings

One of the findings of this study reveals that ASUU NAU members adopted certain coping strategies during the 2022 strike. The study surprisingly found that though many lecturers required coping assistance, the majority did not. This finding is at variance with Akinmayowa and Kadiri, (2014) who found that during periods of economic hardships, civil servants adopt various coping strategies to enable them provide for their families. Business was found to be the major coping strategy adopted by ASUU NAU members during the 2022 ASUU strike. This finding is at variance with the findings of an earlier study by Onwuka, Nwokolo and Achebe (2022) whose study found that farming was the major coping strategy adopted during periods of no-work-no-pay. The study also found out that the coping strategies were effective in curtailing the economic hardship caused by the no-work-no-pay policy of the federal government. This finding in line with Bawalle (2020), the study equally found that ASUU NAU gave members low interest loans and grants to help them cope with the strike. Ogbette, Eke and Ori (2017). found that duration of service could affect how ASUU NAU members cope with strike the hypothesis tested found that there is a significant relationship between duration of service and need for coping assistance during strike among ASUU NAU members.

Conclusion

The ASUU strike in 2022 led to the implementation of the no-work-no-pay policy by the federal government. This policy adversely impacted university lecturers, who had to seek for other means of survival in order to cushion the effect of the strike. Various coping strategies were employed to mitigate the financial hardship imposed by the policy with the majority engaging in more than one strategy to ensure that they had enough for their families' upkeep. This study highlighted that majority of the University lecturers has lost faith in the educational system as a result of their unsatisfactory working conditions leading them to resorting to moonlighting in order to protect themselves from financial strains, which could potentially impact the sustainability of high-quality educational outputs in Nigeria universities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of the study:

1. Lecturers should be encouraged to take up complimentary jobs during strike. This would ensure that they remain productive during strike periods, and also earn money to stay afloat and cater for their immediate families.
2. Lecturers should be given interest-free loans by ASUU whenever the government enforces the no-work-no-pay policy during strike.
3. While bargaining with the government, ASUU should focus more on improved welfare packages for members, also engage persons with vast knowledge in industrial relations to mediate between ASUU and the government by playing conciliatory role in settling the trade dispute between the two parties in order to save the soul of university education in Nigeria and prevent further occurrence of strikes.



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