Assessment of factors responsible for incessant labour crisis in Nigeria: implications for universities stakeholders

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ABSTRACT
Labour crisis in education sector makes planning, organising, controlling, budgeting and implementation of academic and nonacademic activities to be very difficult to achieve. Labour crisis in education settings is a problem that has lingered on for too long, and yet nothing serious has been done about it. Management of labour crisis in Nigeria educational sector requires the attention of the government, educational managers, teachers and non-teaching staff, students, parents as well as other relevant stakeholders like the court of law to bring the desired peace that is void of incessant crises that characterised the Nigeria education system. Therefore, everyone must play his or her role by abiding to agreements of contract and other signed documents like memorandum of understanding among others. Educational managers faces the challenge of re-planning educational activities, re-organising educational inputs, re-coordinating process variables, re-preparing the school calendar, re-teaching lessons, re-assigning old task to new staff and not achieving certain long term goals due to the prolonged un-accomplishment as a result of the crisis. Labour crisis is an event that consumes and waste a lot of time and energy which implies that urgent attention is needed to solve this problem, hence, the need to assess the factors responsible for incessant labour crisis in Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION
The human world is full of crises. Crises arise as a result of disagreements between two antagonising or conflicting groups. Crisis in this regard is a state of disharmony that could be brought about by differences of impulses, desires or tendencies (Canavan & Monahan, 2001). It is a form of disagreement between two or more parties (Abiodun, Dele & Abimbola, 2015). It could mean strife, controversy, discord of action, antagonism of interest (Abdu-Raheem, 2004). The contradiction can be in ideas and views of workers and managers since the goals of different stakeholders in an organisation often differ and are incompatible. Labour crisis is the inability of parties involved in employment relations such as employers and employees represented by their unions or groups to reach agreement on any issue connected with the object of employer-employee interactions (Fajana, 2000). Labour interaction could also be seen as a breakdown of cordial relationship between labour and management over the rights and interests in matter relating to organisation procedures. Labour crisis is thus, the result of an unpalatable, imbalanced and antagonistic relationship and interaction between and among parties involved in industrial relations. The importance of this is that labour crisis is an expression of not-so-good and hostile relationship between and among (inter and intra) industrial relations parties. That is, labour crisis can occur between labour and management, but also between labour and labour or between employers and employers. Hence, such crises are symptoms of industrial unrest in which both workers and management try to pressurise each other.

Labour crisis in the education sector with reference to developing country like Nigeria must be considered a cause for serious concern because of the great value attached to education. It is widely acknowledged that education has social, economical, political, and security benefits for an individual, for a society and for a country. Education is almost everywhere considered as the key to economic prosperity and a vital instrument for combatting disease, tackling poverty, and supporting sustainable development. While labour crisis is bound to exist, its prevalence and re-occurrence, as in Nigeria context, express the existence of unhealthy relationship between key actors in any organisational setting (Wokoma, 2001; Ogunbamuru & Oriabor, 2000).

Since the return of democratic system of governance in the country in 1999, labour crises have become endemic. It is apparent that Nigeria is under serious labour crisis with overwhelming evidences of series of conflicts in the education sector from primary education through secondary to tertiary education. The attendance of these conflicting unions in all the levels of education includes the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnic (ASUP), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Polytechnics (SSANIP), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU), Senior Staff Union of Colleges of Education of Nigeria (SSUCOEN), Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SSANU), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and National Association of Technicians (NAT) among others are the most recognised union within the school system under a larger umbrella of Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Obviously, strike becomes the only weapon to be employed by these workers to compel a recalcitrant employer especially the government who is there employer to recognise and bargain with the identified trade unions, to comply with the terms and conditions of an employment relationship.

The incessant crises by these unions are due to the non-fulfilment of one need or the other by the management which have disrupted the school calendar and academic excellence are fast paving way for mediocrity and academic backwardness. In Nigeria, there is hardly a full academic session that student and staff crises will not occur in one institution or the other especially in the areas of funding and welfare and the end result to loss of studies, delayed graduation for students and economic waste for students, parents and the country as a whole (Oyetakin, Alabi & Kayode, 2012). These problems have over the years been a subject of great concern to all stakeholders in the sector. The university as role models of innovation and agents of change (through relevant manpower training, the acquisition development and inculcation of proper values for the development of intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate the local and external environments), like any other institutions of the world is not without potential negative features, incompatible behaviours and conflicts which might be counter-productive and give rise to inefficiency, ineffectiveness or dysfunctional consequences in the achievement of goals and...
objectives (Adepoju & Sofowora, 2012; Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem & Odigwe, 2013). Given that crisis is inevitable in any university is not an exception, the point of view is, how to react to, respond to and manage so that positive 25s will be utilised while negative effects minimised. The above statement may be responsible for the continuous growing concern of all stakeholders in the education industry on relations that are likely to affect the education system, as well as the implications such relations will have on the management and administration of education. The preceding goals and objectives of education can only be achievable under a well supported and conducive environment made possible by a relationship from both the management and staff. This synergy between the management and staff will be engaged in the pursuit and accomplishment of educational goals. Staff are essential to the means of production, hence, they deserve to be treated with respect, this will in turn improve their sense of worth and belongingness, boost their self-esteem and act as a sort of motivation to drive them to have more passion for their job and increase their productivity.

1.1 Causes of Labour Crises

Several factors determine the cooperation of both the labour and management either to become harmonious and cooperative relationship or a strained and non-cooperative one. However, from time to time, politicians, academicians, administrators, educators, parents, students and opinion leaders either called for a rescue mission or called for a change in the education sector or called for a change in the education sector. They consider as decline and decay in the education sector. Their lamentation is usually based on the standard and percentages of university graduates that are unemployable because of their poor quality and slow progress towards meeting the developmental needs of the country (Wokoma, 2011). The following are some of the identified factors why workers and their unions result to creating crisis. Dissatisfaction with the education in the educational profession which may be unpopular and harsh, poor funding, non-compliance to agreement, wrongful discharge or dismissal of workers, withdrawal of any concession or privilege, hours of work and rest intervals, dispute connected with minimum wages, refusal of union recognition, political views on conflicts between the working class and their employers, introduction of new technology which affect the traditional ways of doing work among others. Tensions created by labour crisis in the country have become alarming. This would prompt a discerning mind to enquire for an understanding as to the reasons and causes of labour crises. Though there may be ready answers to this, the crises of education in Nigeria have different dimensions and manifestations but efforts in this study were based on internal and external factors as discussed below.

Poor funding: Amadi and Urban (2011) noted that the annual budget in Nigeria is low compared to the budget made for other things in the state. For example, budget for elections and numerous huge amount of money mismanaged could be responsible for the existing poor teaching and learning facilities in our universities and poor quality graduates produced. The United Nations in an attempt to improve education in Nigeria recommended that 26 percent of the Nation’s budget should be channelled into the education sector. It has been noted that Nigeria’s education system has never met such conditions, this further results in many institutions of learning being underfunded with the recurrent national single budget digit for education that often characterise with poor infrastructural supplies, poor payment of salaries and poor maintenance of existing school plants which often makes various educational bodies to get upset with the poor work flow and poor regeneration pattern. The above scenario account for the labour crises that occurred on 20th of May, 1980, when a trade disputes was declared with the Governing Councils of Universities in Nigeria, which demanded improved funding of the universities, academic freedom, autonomy as well as the setting up of a special body to review the conditions of service of the universities’ staff (Owoeye, 1991). Also, in 1992, members of Academic Staff of Universities (ASUU) declared an industrial dispute, over gross underfunding of universities in Nigeria, poor conditions of service of the academic staff, university autonomy, as well as the need for academic freedom. The strike lasted for about nine months nationwide and a separate Salary Scale tagged University Academic Staff Salary (UASS) was approved by government. This further triggered another strike by the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), which sought parity in salary with the Academic Staff Union (ASUU).

In February, 1993, the University Academic Salary Scale (UASS), earlier approved for ASUU members, was cancelled and replaced with an Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS). This made ASUU to declare another strike action on 26th February, 1993, to challenge the cancellation of the previously approved UASS. Though the strike lasted for about five months and the resultant effect led to the cancellation of the 1993/94 academic session in most universities. Furthermore, in November 2016, ASUU went on a one-week warning strike. That strike was a culmination of the persistent call on the Federal Government to address issues bordering on how the Nigerian university system, how they can deal with the rot and decay in the system. An understanding was reached on the issues leading to the warning strike, but government again did nothing immediately the strike action was suspended. Till today, the stories have not change as various public educational institutions still engage government on same issues at every given time. Elsewhere, in country like United State of America on the issue of poor funding of education system, Cortes V. Mujica ELC successfully challenged a decision by New York State’s Director of Budget to withhold grant funds appropriated by the Legislature to improve school performance, resulting in the release of $69 million dollars in transformation grants to nine schools. Also NYSER V. State ELC joined Michael Rebell and Morgan Lewis and Bockius in the New York State to fulfill its constitutional obligation to adequately fund the public schools in the wake of the landmark campaign for fiscal equity rulings. The case alleges that chronic underfunding has deprived students of essential education resources, including teachers, reasonable class size, tutoring, social workers, and interventions for at-risk individuals.

Non-compliance to agreement: Workers and employers usually reach agreements after negotiations but in some cases one party may refuse to honour the agreements. For example, Since 2002, ASUU has been on total strike because of Federal Government failure to honour the agreements it reached with ASUU in 2001 over proper funding. Again, on 22nd of June, 2009, the national bodies of ASUU declared a total and indefinite strike, to compel Federal Government of Nigeria to sign the agreement reached with ASUU on the re-negotiation of June, 2001 PGN-ASUU Agreement. A report by Odim, Annastashia and Solomon (2018) also indicated that all the tertiary institutions in Kwaara State embarked on a strike, demanding for one hundred percent implementation of the Consolidated Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Salary Structure (CONPCASS) and the Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure (CONTEDISS), effective from January, 2009.

Also, in October, 2010, all the Universities in the Southeast zone of Nigeria embarked on an indefinite strike, where they demanded for the implementation of the agreements signed with Government particularly on salary and allowances. The 2010/2011 ASUU crises occurred due to Government failure to comply with already signed agreements in 2009 and memorandum of understanding (MoU) endorsed by both parties in 2012. The strike lasted for over a month and was temporarily called-off on the 17th of September, 2017 pending when the government will implement the new agreement. Areas of the new agreement included funding for revitalization of public universities and the issue of earn academic allowances, the issue of university staff schools and the implementation of the judgment of the national industrial court, national universities pension management company and guidelines for pension matters for professors. It is amazing that majority of this agreement is yet to be fulfilled as the national executives of ASUU are threatening to embark on another school lock out as at the beginning of September, 2021.

Refusal of union recognition: workers often resort to crises so that the employer would recognise them as a union and thus, make them parties in collective bargaining. For example, in Osun state university there was a faceoff between university workers and the management on various issues. The most recent was the arbitrary termination of academic staff of this university by the management based on the recommendation of the government that majority of the affected staff refuse to upgrade on their job. The workers reacted against the affected workers were their inability to update their credentials, refusal to attend seminars and low publications in local
and international journals. This led to faceoff between both parties and the joint labour union members of Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) take the matter up for redress. All these acts of arbitrariness did not have the three labour unions; ASUU, SSANU and NASU on collision with the management of many universities. The blatant refusal of university management to allow for participatory decision-making has also caused some problems. The contention has always been that all segments of the university, namely academic and non-academic staff; students and public at large must be involved in the administration of the system.

Also, in the month of May, 2021, Kaduna state government take a drastic action to reduce the number of workers under Kaduna state payroll due to monthly allocation which seems not enough to maintain workers and deliver social amenities as promised by Governor Nasir El Rufai led government to the citizens. Earlier the same government also retrenched workers in the teaching service commission on issues relating to incompetence. However, this decision meant a total rejection by the state leadership of Nigeria Labour Congress led by Comrade Ayuba Magaji Sulaiman that the government cannot just wake up and decide to sack over 7000 workers, without any notice or severance payment for the affected workers (Vanguard, 2021). Together with other labour unions within the state and national levels were of the belief that these workers are human beings with families as dependants; hence the decision was seen as a bad one and it calls for a plan to shut down the state for five days to protest the strike. Here too, the management and government to allow for participatory decision-making with concerned labour unions on the need for such decisions and possible way forward has also caused the labour crises that nearly ground social and economic activities within the state. Olorode (2001) insists that the inability to effectively manage the school resources available was due to the fact that people according to their whims and caprices have been given most unlimited power to manipulate school resources. In his opinion, the high rate of ineffectiveness, arbitrariness and high handedness arises from the absence of democratic control of the school system often caused a lot of crises.

**Poop and unconductive conditions of service:** it is another reason why labour crises surfaced. Unconductive working environment, inadequate pay packages, poor welfare services, etc, are some plights of the workers that spur them to strike. Teachers are not offered additional incentives and working conditions as their counterparts. For example, those in health and other sectors receive extra payment for hazards in their jobs but such cannot be heard of in education even though there are also hazards in discharging teaching duties. According to Amadi and Urho (2015), this condition of service or employment include features such working conditions like working environment, hours or work, over time shift work, flexible working hours; fringe benefits like pension scheme, organisation goods at a discount, organisation cars; and application of fair judicial procedures. It is pitiable that such conditions of employment in some organisation are seen as a private interest. For instance, is the case of Bkadiri Ajasa Apampa v. The State (1981), with Suit No.: SC97/1981; LN-e-LR/1982/9(SC) where Bkadiri Ajasa Apampa was charged with acquiring a private interest in a contract of purchase on account of the public service. Other court cases in this regard include; a case between Federal Polytechnic Bauchi and Anor V. Abdulfattah, Aboaaba and Anor (2013) on illegal termination of employment with Suit No.: CA/J/290/2006; LN-C-LR/2013/64. Also, Adeniyi V. Governing Council of Yaba College of Technology (1993) on compulsory retirement from service with Suit No.: SC.197/1990; 3PLR/1993/5(SC); NWLR (pt.500) p.426. Another related case, was between Dr. Obo V. Commissioner for Education Bendel State (2001) on termination of appointment as a civil servant in the civil service of the Bendel State of Nigeria with Suit No.: SC./81/93; 3PLR/2001/109(SC); ZNWLRI (pt.698) p.625. University staff could demand for the immediate reinstatement of their colleagues who have been unfairly dismissed or punished by government while acting on their behalf, failure of which might result in crises.

For instance, at the University of Abuja, the management unilaterally sacked thirty-five teachers, dissolved senate, created programmes and altered the academic structure of the university. In addition, the management was intolerant to the creation of alternative views and labour unions. The management would ultimately declare that there was the “Law”. The management was said to have displayed extreme autocratic tendencies contrary to the expectations of the management social and academic status. The school was run like chieftdom and with unbelievable brutality (Egbokhare, 2000).

**Poor and inconsistent payment of salaries and other emoluments:** When there is a delay in payment of salaries without a justifiable reason for such delay, labour crisis may erupt for such salaries to be paid. Ezeagba, (2014), noted that in Nigeria many organisations always delay or refuse to pay their workers’ salaries and other emoluments even when the organisation concerned have sufficient funds to pay. For example, secondary schools in Anambra state were on strike for non-payment of salaries and emoluments (Ozunbor, Annastashia & Solomon, 2018). University workers are often underpaid and most times the Government pays part salaries to lecturers. For example, in year 2020, ASUU still embarked on an indefinite strike on the anomalies and disparities observed in the usage of the newly introduced Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPSIS) platform by Federal Government in the payment of workers’ salaries, though the strike was later called off towards the tail end of the year but the persistent issue for the call is yet to be addressed. Lecturers are not happy due to the fact that many politicians go home with huge sum of money even when such politicians are not as educated as they are. According to Amadi and Urho (2015), the underpayment of university staff vis-à-vis their counterparts in other economic sectors and the disjunction of the hierarchy structure between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) have been a major cause of their dissatisfaction.

**Failure of collective bargaining:** this is another major reason for labour crises. Okene (2008) avers that “the main justification for industrial action is the failure of collective bargaining”. When workers and employers engage in collective bargaining, there is no guarantee that it will be successful. Even when successful, there is no guarantee that it will be honoured. Consequently, unsuccessful bargaining and failure to adhere to agreed terms naturally lead to labour crises and dislocation of industrial harmony and peace. For example, the industrial imbroglio between ASUU and South-East governments stem from the inability of the state governments in the South-East to honour and implement the FG-ASUU 2007 agreement. This FG-ASUU 2007 agreement at different occasion led to work boycott in many Federal universities and symptoms has begin to manifest in other government owned institutions. Such manifestation is the ongoing strike of Academic Staff Union of Polytechnic (ASUP). The above instance and many related cases makes unions especially educational unions to be adjudged as a group of greedy, egoistic folks who are only after their selfish interest, as no one is interested in making the system work. The ASUU 2007 agreement was a major cause of their dissatisfaction.

**Political interference in education:** Many times the university has no autonomy to operate as an entity without the leaders in political offices trying to use their positions to influence activities. Schools are not allowed to make educational decisions without such interference. This creates problems when educational system fail to operate to the idea of self-regulating. Amadi and Urho (2015) noted that, the seats of Vice-Chancellor and Registrar of universities are keenly contested for. It was noted that one of the reasons why people leave universities is because there is a lot of interference in academic freedom. Sometimes, however, government intervention is inevitable where there is an ongoing rift among university staff.

**Unpopular and harsh public policies:** unfriendly and harsh policies by governments and employers are veritable factors that have caused many severe labour crises. Most public policies made by government have met stiff opposition by the labour. Workers and their unions usually resort to crises to express their displeasures on such
perceived anti-labour policies, decisions and/or legislations. In  
Nigeria, a number of public policies have stirred series of labour  
crises. Notably, among such policies, was the incessant fuel price hike that  
marked by during President Obasanjo (1999 to 2007) and Goodluck  
Jonathan (2010 to 2015) civilian administration. During this time, Nigeria witnessed frequent and  
regular series of crises called by the central labour organisation.  
NLC, led by Comrade Adams Oshiomohle and Comrade Ayuba Waabah  
respectively continued to linger on till today. Recently, in the  
administration of President Mohammadu Buhari (2015 till date) there  
was also a repeat of such action this year where work boycott was  
called by NLC. These actions cutting across different administrations  
were as a result of labour’s disapproval and total rejection of fuel  
price hikes. Elsewhere, in country like France in 2010, witnessed a  
damaging strike action and protest against government’s decision to  
review upward the retirement age of workers.  
So also, in Obafemi Awolowo University there was a showdown  
between labour unions and management on various issues. For  
example, following the action of the management refusal to pay the  
long awaited over thirty month arrears of various allowances ranging  
from hazard allowance, leave bonus among others to the non-  
academic staff that cut across NASU, SSANU and NAT in July  
2015 led to the blockage of roads by the protesting workers and the  
consequent échanson of school activities where all offices were  
locked preventing entry or exit of other personnel who are member of their union. This problem led to the usage of the then  
Ooni of Ife (Late Oba Okunade Sijuwade) as a mediator between the  
concern parties. However, this measure proves abortive and finally  
the issue was taken to court for redress. In the same vein, the labour  
crises that occurred in Obafemi Awolowo University in March 2016  
was the result of loggerhead between the labour unions and  
management which was based on the modalities for the selection of  
candidate to fill the vacant position of the office of the vice chancellor.  
The labour union was of the belief that the management was planning  
to jump justice and resolve to manipulation of criteria to be used for  
candidacy selection; majorly the law backing the selection process  
and the whole process was brought to a standstill with no progress.  
However, this particular issue was also placed before a high court  
situated in the state capital for redress.  

Also, in 1996, at the then Ogun State University (now Olabisi  
Onabanjo University), Aago-Iwoye, over one hundred academic staff  
were unilaterally sacked by the management for their refusal to pay  
salaries and other emoluments such as delay in payment of salaries  
and inconsistent payment of welfare services, among others; poor and  
uncondusive working environment, innovative and unprofessional  
approach, refusal of union recognition in major decision making  
processes; refusal of participation in meetings; and the refusal to sign  
agreement. Such actions have also been reported in universities such  
as Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Ilorin in Kwara  
State where staff were unilaterally sacked by the management for their  
refusal to “sign” the new agreement. At Obafemi Awolowo University,  
the issue was taken to court for redress. However, this measure proves  
abortive and finally the issue was placed before a high court  
situated in the state capital for redress.  

2. CONCLUSION  
It can be concluded that the identified factors why workers and  
their unions result to creating crisis include: poor funding of the  
university education; non-compliance to reached agreements after  
negotiations; refusal of union recognition in major decision making  
that concerns their welfare, poor conditions of service such as  
uncondusive working environment, inadequate pay packages, poor  
wellness services, among others; poor and inconsistent payment of  
salaries and other emoluments such as delay in payment of salaries  
without a justifiable reason for such delay; failure to collective  
bargaining; political interference; as well as unpopular and harsh  
policies. Therefore, labour crises in Nigeria education system  
need to be urgently addressed and checkedmate, hence, collective  
bargaining has to be embedded within the concept of dialogue and all  
types of negotiation, consultation between, or among,  
representatives of government, employers and workers on issues of  
common interest relating to economic and social policy.  

3. RECOMMENDATIONS  
In view of the identified effects of labour crises, the following  
measures, amongst other things, are recommended as ways of  
reducing labour crises and effects. Educational managers at all levels  
especially those managing universities should ensure that proper  
remuneration and motivation techniques are used to boost the  
morale of other staff. Employee morale should be boosted by all  
means possible. Employers should recognise that human resources  
are the soul of the business and not the sole to be trampled on.  
Employers in the education sector should arm the workers with  
necessary morale boosters, respect and recognition to ensure  
industrial peace and harmony. This will go a long way in aiding both  
parties achieve both individual and collective interests and objectives  
within a world of intense interconnectivity and integration. The  
government should respect every agreement entered in to and  
maintain consistently, their terms of agreement. More funds should  
be allocated and channeled into education sector from the national  
budget in every fiscal year and the government should provide all  
relevant materials, facilities, equipment and other school plant  
necessary for the smooth running and management of universities in  
Nigeria. All relevant trade unions related to education should ensure  
that proper communication between them and the Government is  
established and make efforts to resolve issues such as strikes  
before they occur. Such as dialogue rather than embark on strike all  
time. During crisis and strike periods, the staff should ensure that all  
the purposes for which they struck are met before thinking of calling off the strike.  
This will help reduce the frequency of strike occurring and re-  
occurring. Finally, there should be the need for a legislation which  
will give legal backing to collective agreement. Such legislation would  
give mandatory recognition to collective agreement and make it  
enforceable within a legal framework. This will go a long way in  
containing the propensity to default in honouring collective  
agreement.

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